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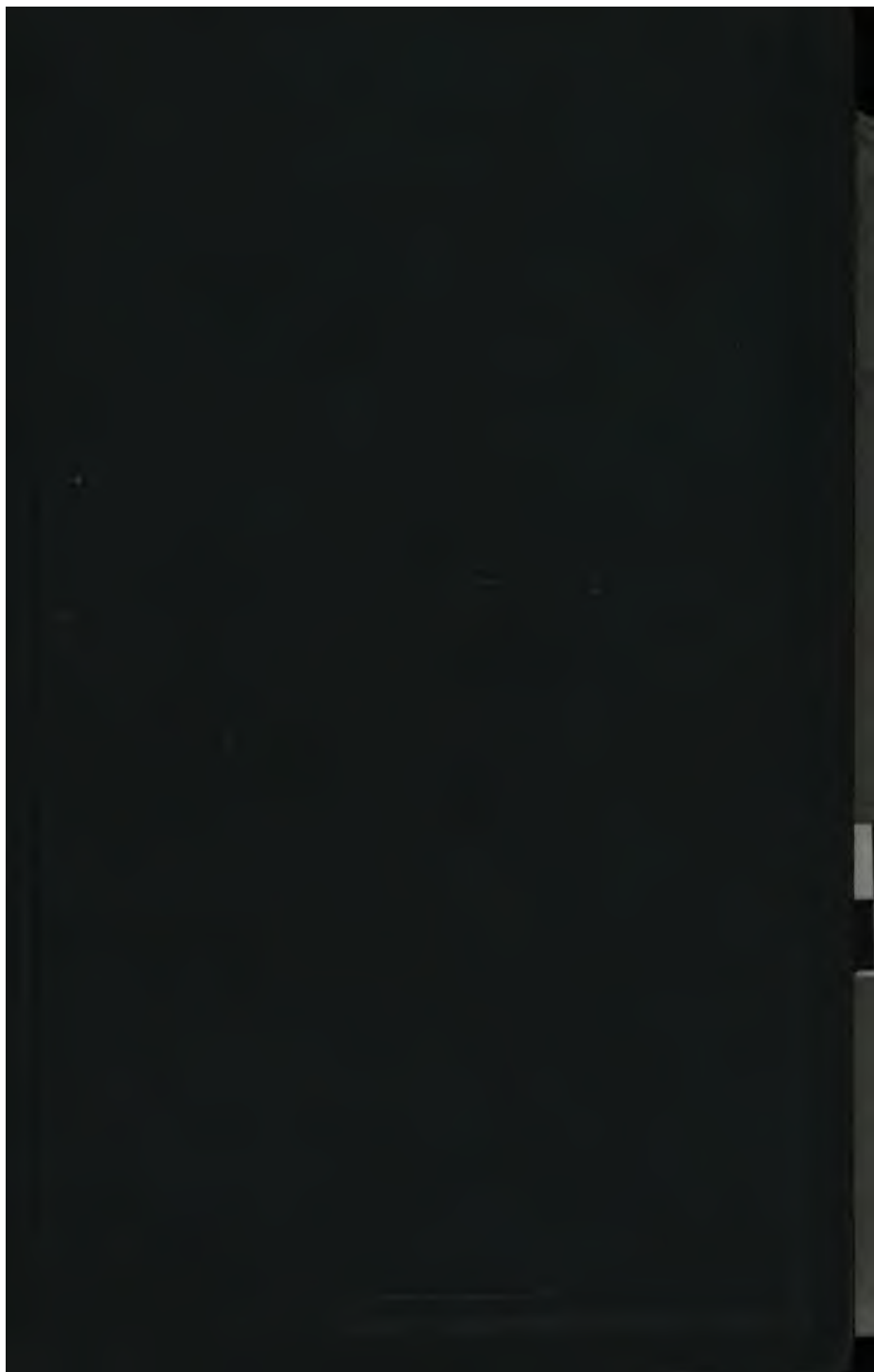
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AS LONG AS SHE LIVED.

VOL. III.

AS LONG AS SHE LIVED.

BY

F. W. ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF

“GRANDMOTHER’S MONEY,” “NO CHURCH,”

“LITTLE KATE KIRBY,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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BOOK III.

(CONTINUED.)

Angelo.



AS LONG AS SHE LIVED.

CHAPTER V.

MAKING HIS PEACE.

THE ex-curator of Penton Museum was not too well pleased at Mabel Westbrook's interdict. The mysteries rising about his present life, or about the lives of those in whom he was interested, irritated one who had always hated mystery, and this sudden exhibition of want of confidence in him—or what appeared to be want of confidence—did not add to his composure. Still he was not disposed to utter another harsh word to Mabel Westbrook, if he could help it; he had offended her already, and must stand upon his guard.

"Why may I not visit Angelo Salmon?" he inquired.

"Angelo is probably asleep. He must not be disturbed or surprised," said Mabel.

For the life of him Brian could not keep his rasping tongue quiet that evening.

"You take most excellent care of him," he answered; "he should be highly flattered by your attention."

"He has been ill—very ill."

"Ah! yes, I had forgotten," said Brian; "but is he not well now?"

"He is much better."

"Perhaps you will pave the way to my visit by a few remarks, that will prepare him for the terrible ordeal of my presence?" said Brian.

"No, Mr. Halfday, it is too late to-night. You are not so deeply attached to him that you cannot postpone your call till the morning," she replied.

"I cannot see what difference it makes," said her obstinate companion.

"I wish it," said Mabel, very imperiously now.



Mabel was irritated also by his ungracious mood, and when she regarded him coldly and proudly—as in those distant and distrustful days which he had hoped had vanished for ever—he succumbed and was penitent. It was his promise to sink every impulse of his own, when it was opposed to hers; he had remembered it in time.

“Very well, Miss Westbrook—let it be then as you wish,” he said.

Mabel, naturally an amiable girl, was softened at once by his obedience. She was outspoken too, and as they walked away from Angelo’s room, she said,

“Why are you so unjust to-night?”

Brian answered her when they were close to the drawing-room again. There were chairs scattered on the landing, and here, at an earlier hour of the evening, a fair number of spectators had assembled to watch the life in the hall below, and to catch glimpses of it through the open doors of the drawing-room and ball-room. The spectators had gone their various ways, and the landing-place was deserted.

Brian moved a chair towards her.

"Will you sit down, or have I wounded you too deeply to be forgiven?"

Mabel took the seat he had placed for her. He sat down close to her, and dashed into his explanation.

"Why am I unjust to-night? you ask me," he said, with his old rapid rush of words; "because I am unhappy!—because I return to find myself an object of suspicion——"

"No—no," interrupted Mabel.

"Because I find so many changes," he continued, "where I had hoped all would have been the same to me; because you are changed too, and by your own acknowledgment."

"Yes—I am changed," replied Mabel, thoughtfully; "but not towards you."

"Thank you," he answered, so gratefully, and looking such deep gratitude with his eyes, that she hastened to add—

"You have been my friend of late days, and I want to think of you always as a friend—as a brother on whom I can rely when any doubt or difficulty besets me. If there have been any mysteries to-night——"

"By George—*If!*" he exclaimed.

"There has at least been no intention to keep them from you," she continued; "only you have been impetuous, and inconsiderate, and harsh."

"It is my nature," murmured Brian; "I will live it down in time. I think I am improving a little, do you know?"

"I have not seen much evidence of it this evening," was Mabel's quiet comment here.

"I came to Scarborough in an amiable frame of mind enough," said Brian; "happy in the consciousness that I was going to meet you, and that you would not be displeased to welcome me. I had heard at St. Lazarus of your engagement to Angelo Salmon, and though I was surprised at the news, and unable to account for it, or to reconcile it with a previous fact which you had told me, I was neither angry, nor dissatisfied, nor jealous. For I have lived down my presumption—I had already mastered it when I told you of the dream that I had had once—and I could think of your happiness unselfishly. I hope you understand me?"

"Yes—I think I understand," said Mabel.

"I must confess I was put out by seeing you dance," he added; "I don't know why—I can't explain that very clearly just at present—tomorrow I shall be able to analyze my feelings more satisfactorily."

"I will excuse the explanation," said Mabel.

"Very well," replied Brian, "it is merciful of you, for upon second reflection I am afraid my conduct was absolutely inexcusable. There, have I apologized sufficiently?"

"Yes."

"And we are as good friends as ever?"

"Yes," she said again.

"We will shake hands upon it, if you please," said Brian, and Mabel put her hand confidently into his.

It was a happy reconciliation, but Brian did not press the hand which was pledged solemnly to another's. He was content with her friendship; he was sure he had imperilled it that night, but had not lost it. The hand was still in his, for he had not too quickly resigned it, when the door of No. 28 in the corridor was softly opened, and a young man in evening dress, with a face as white as death, and with

almost death's solemnity upon it, advanced to the balcony, and looked across at them without a smile of recognition.

"See—there is Angelo," said Mabel, snatching her hand away from Brian very quickly.

CHAPTER VI.

NOT RIGHT.

ANGELO SALMON came slowly round the corridor towards them, and Brian, interested in the change in him, and the mystery about his present life, watched him through his glasses. Angelo advanced like a ghost in full dress; his step was solemn, slow, and noiseless, and he kept his gaze directed to them both with great intentness, as though Brian and Mabel might be from spirit-land themselves, and fade away at any moment from his yearning looks.

Yes, this was the ghost of the old, simple, placid Angelo, thought Brian, and the man had been very ill, or had met trouble very badly, to change like that, and in so short a period. The

cherubic look about his cheeks had wholly gone, and there were cavernous hollows in them, as in a man's marked out for a rapid decline of health or life. He seemed to have grown taller in his illness also, and was thin enough for the shadow of his former self.

He did not recognize Brian in his glasses, or it had not entered his head to give a thought to Mabel's companion; for he said, addressing Mabel,

"I thought you were dancing. How is it you are sitting here, my darling?"

It was a familiar tone of address, and Brian winced at it, as though indirectly it affected him. He glanced at Mabel, and noticed that the colour quivered on her cheeks for an instant before she answered him.

"I have been dancing, Angelo."

"That's right. It will do you good. I don't mind in the least—I want you to enjoy this place thoroughly—to think of me a little less, and of yourself a little more. For I am not naturally selfish, and you have been kind to me. Always," he added, thoughtfully, "very, very kind."

He looked at Brian at last, and it was with an inquiring stare that was strange enough considering their antecedents, and the little difference the thin steel-framed spectacles made in Brian's general appearance.

"Do I know him, Mabel?" Angelo said at last, in a low tone. "Is this a friend of mine or not?"

"To be sure it is. Why don't you speak to Mr. Salmon," Mabel said to Brian, almost tetchily, "instead of glaring at him in that way through your glasses?"

Brian removed his spectacles forthwith. He had been studying Angelo very closely, and his silence had been unintentional in consequence.

"How do you do, Mr. Salmon?" he said, extending his hand to him as to an old friend. There was a faint exhibition of reluctance on Angelo's part to take his hand, but it was momentary.

"Oh! yes—I recollect you now, but the spectacles deceived me, and I had forgotten how short-sighted you were," said Angelo, shaking hands with him; "you are Brian Halfday, of

the Museum at Penton. I am very glad to see you ; I am indeed."

Angelo Salmon made up for his former reticence of demeanour by pumping vigorously at Brian's arm, and even smiling at him in a ghastly manner, strangely at variance with the old feeble simper that had been natural to him.

"I have been very ill, Mr. Halfday," he said ; "has not Mabel told you?"

"Yes, I have learned the news. But you are better now, I hear?"

"Oh ! yes, much better, thank you," he said, relinquishing his grasp of Brian's hand at last, "infinitely better. I'll tell you all about it when the lady is away. All her fault, not mine," he said, resting his hand lightly on her shoulder, "but all her fault too, or care, or kindness—which is it, Mabel?—that brings me back from a grave."

"You are indebted to Miss Westbrook," remarked Brian.

"For life, sir, for life," said Angelo passionately.

"Mr. Salmon is more than ordinarily grate-

ful for those little favours which a friend is too glad to bestow in time of trouble or sickness—that is the explanation,” said Mabel to Brian.

“Oh, no, it is not,” said Angelo quickly, “as you will understand when I tell you, Mr. Half-day, all that has happened since I had the pleasure of seeing you last. You cannot imagine the change to my life that has occurred, or how this dear, good angel has come from the clouds to brighten it.”

“The dear, good angel insists upon your keeping back all revelations till the morning, Angelo,” said Mabel, laughing at his rhapsody.

“I should be glad to tell Mr. Halfday everything. I have no secrets from him, Mabel,” replied Angelo; “he remembers the night I came to Penton Museum, and told him the whole truth, and asked him what to do.”

“I remember perfectly,” said Brian, “but I have been travelling to-day, and am fatigued. With your good leave we will talk of this to-morrow.”

“Ye—es,” said Angelo, still clinging to his point, “but I should have thought, for all that, that you would have been glad to hear the

story to-night. It will not take very long," he added, as an extra inducement to continue the narration.

But Brian Halfday had had his cue from Mabel; he shook his head, and feigned weariness with considerable skill.

"I am tired, Angelo," he said; "you must excuse me to-night; I ask it as a favour."

"Very well—very well," replied Angelo; "I will look you up to-morrow. Are you an early riser?"

"Generally."

"I shall be on the sands, walking towards Filey, at five o'clock."

"Thank you, that's rather too early, and at this time of year rather too dark."

"Six o'clock, then?"

"Ay, or seven. I would prefer seven, if you have no objection."

"It's too late for a stroll before breakfast. I thought you were an excellent walker, Half-day."

"As a rule, I think I am. And presently," said Brian, regarding him gravely and attentively again, "we will take some good spins

together along these Yorkshire valleys. Shall we?"

"I shall be glad, when I have time—when," he said, "Mabel can spare me. You know," he cried, with a sudden outburst of confidence, "that we are engaged to be married. You have heard that—everybody has told you that, of course?"

"I have heard of the engagement from several sources," was the answer.

Angelo laughed long and loudly, and clapped his thin white hands together in his excitement.

"I daresay. The whole world is talking about it, I verily believe; I hear of it from all quarters. I am congratulated upon my happiness everywhere—as I have a right to be, now that the light streams in upon me, Heaven be praised!"

"Angelo, will you bid Mr. Halfday and me good night now?" Mabel asked as she rose.

"If you wish it, certainly."

"It is late for you."

"Good night," he said to Brian, shaking hands with him.



"Good night," echoed Brian.

"I will see you to the door of your room, Angelo—there is your mother waiting for you already, and wondering what detains you to-night."

"I don't sleep, Brian, that's the worst of it," he said confidentially to our hero; "and yet I have nothing on my mind now. All's peace and rest."

"I congratulate you," answered Brian. "Good night."

Angelo Salmon walked away with Mabel leaning on his arm, and Brian folded his hands upon the balcony and watched them both.

As they passed the drawing-room, Mr. Gregory Salmon came out and joined them, seemed surprised to find his son in the corridor, but laughed and talked with him and Mabel in an amiable manner, that suggested a long run of luck at sixpenny points. Brian looked after them still, with his face deepening in its intensity of shadow. They passed into the private sitting-room, but Brian waited as if the night had not ended for him yet, and it was scarcely time to think of his fatigue. Mabel had not

bidden him good night; she would come back and say a few words, and listen to the few words which he had to say in return, and which were bearing upon him like a weight. Yes, there was more to declare and explain, and the colours of the life about him were taking stranger hues.

It was late, but the "Mastodon" kept late hours, and perfect repose was only known within its walls in the sharp Winter time. The drawing-room guests dribbled away to their rooms, and the servant came and put the gas out, but the lights burned downstairs still, and there were flutterings of flame in all the corridors. The waiters were busy clearing up, or preparing for the morning; the smoking-room was full of sleepless and loquacious souls; the billiard balls were rolling swiftly and eternally across the green cloth downstairs; the night-porter was in his room preparing for a little peace in an arm-chair before the fire; one or two couples strolled across the tessellated pavement, love-making in the gloom; the parties from festivities elsewhere came in from the outer world laughing and chatting as

though the night were young yet, and went their various ways, upstairs and downstairs, without heed to those wiser folk who had gone to bed betimes. Brian watched all this, or looked at this, as in a dream; it seemed very dreamlike to be sitting in a corridor of an hotel at Scarborough, waiting for the grim truths that would presently dismay him.

He did not wait in vain. The door of the room beyond opened again, and Mabel Westbrook emerged, and came swiftly towards him.

"I thought you might be here," she said when she was close to him; "I remembered I had not bidden you good night. Would you——"

"Would I what?" he asked, as she paused suddenly.

"Would you like to see Mr. and Mrs. Salmon? They bade me——"

"No, thank you. It is late. I shall see them to-morrow."

There was a pause of some length; Mabel seemed to wish to say something more besides good night.

"Well?" she said at last, interrogatively.

"Well?" he echoed back.

"Do you understand the position? What do you think of it?" she asked with a little impatience. "Could I do more, or less, than I have done?"

"I hardly know what you have done, Miss Westbroek."

"I have humoured a delusion to save Angelo Salmon," was the answer.

"Save him from what?"

"A madhouse," replied Mabel, with a shudder.

"Yes, yes, I see—I understand now," said Brian; "always you the victim and the sacrifice—always these thoughts for others, and no one with a thought for you. Why did you not write to me and let me know?" he asked more passionately; "ah! I had forgotten you had pleaded for time, and I had gone away from you. That was my ill fortune—I was always a fool."

"Nothing could have been done," replied Mabel; "I could not have asked you for advice. I do not regret the step I have taken; if it

saves that poor weak-minded fellow from mental ruin, why should I regret it?"

"Do you mean you will marry him?" cried Brian.

"It was your advice once," was the demure answer here; "you thought it would be best for me."

"I did not think he would degenerate into an idiot," Brian replied roughly; "how has it all occurred?"

"Is it not a story sufficient to charm a young woman of my age?" said Mabel sadly, but somewhat bitterly; "don't you see the halo of romance round it, a ring of liquid gold?"

"No—I don't."

"Here is a man actually dying of love for a woman in the latter half of the nineteenth century," said Mabel, "who gives up at the first refusal, and takes to fretting like a school-girl—who becomes a source of alarm to his relations—who meditates suicide, and—there—it is the truth, attempts it!—whose brain seems to collapse, until I come to him with healing words, and hopes, and promises, and save him as by a miracle."

"It is a miserable position," said Brian, moodily; "who placed you in it?"

"They came to me—his parents, who had been kind to me," replied Mabel; "he was the one comfort they had in the world—and my words only could save him from despair, they said."

"He must have loved you very much—but then," said Brian, almost contemptuously, "he was giving way by degrees, and any disappointment would have wrecked him as utterly as this. The man was bound to go mad at some time or other."

"He is getting well rapidly. I feel I have saved him."

"That is the romance of it—what is to be the reality in days to come, God knows," Brian groaned forth.

"I do not think of the reality yet," said Mabel.

"Why not?"

"I can't—I have not the courage," she confessed, with a sigh.

"You are humouring a delusion," said Brian, quoting her former words, "you have no

deliberate intention of linking your life to this weak fellow's."

"Brian," said Mabel, "I don't see my way—perhaps I am afraid of all I have promised for his sake. I may want your strong mind to think for me, to help me, to teach me what shall be my duty—for I am weaker than I thought I was. You will think for me in good time, and not unselfishly, and, whatever happens, not uncharitably."

Brian Halfday was touched by this appeal. His voice was low and hoarse as he replied,

"Whatever happens! What does the girl whom I am pledged to study all my life mean by 'whatever happens?'"

"Don't ask me now—good night. I have lingered here too long already. And don't think me unhappy—it has not come to that. I was almost happy till you——"

"Till I came," said Brian, drily. "Yes, I saw it."

"Till you met me with hard words," she continued, "till you looked at me angrily, and made me think the friend I wished to see had put an ogre in his place."

The last words were uttered saucily, and in her old bright tones, and Brian brightened up at them.

"Well, the ogre is dismissed to Hades," said Brian, "and the friend remains for all time. And, 'whatever happens,' Mabel Westbrook, there is one thing you cannot understand too clearly or too soon."

He was holding her hand again before bidding her good night.

"What is that?" she asked, looking away from him.

"That your life is not to be sacrificed to Angelo's—that must never be. I am your guardian, and interdict it solemnly. Good night."

"Good night."

Man and maiden parted, and the light which had flickered about them in the last moments of their interview, died from their faces by degrees as they went their separate ways. There was darkness ahead of them, and it was not possible, as Mabel had already prophesied, to see what lay beyond the limits of the day. Here was a difficult task to undertake, and of only

one thing was Brian Halfday assured, or believed he was assured, and that was that under no circumstances of life should Mabel Westbrook marry Angelo Salmon now. Fixed as fate was that decree in his mind, and he was happier already for having promulgated it to her whom it principally concerned.

CHAPTER VII.

MICHAEL SEWELL.

BRIAN HALFDAY was not unmindful of his appointment with Angelo Salmon on the following day. True to his old punctual habits, he was descending the grand staircase of the "Mastodon" as the clock in the hall was striking seven. It was a bright, breezy morning as he stepped from the portico of the hotel to the street, and went on a few paces to the railing that skirted the cliff, where he paused and looked across the sea, full of light and life in the early sunshine.

Brian had the view to himself for a while. The visitors at the "Mastodon" were not early
and the white frost on the cliff



railing, and on the top of the bathing machines below, was scarcely inviting to those who loved warmth within doors. It was a keen air, and Brian found it necessary after a while to walk up and down at a sharp pace to keep his blood in circulation, whilst he wondered what had become of Angelo, and whether another thought of meeting him had crossed that young man's mind, or the little that was left of it.

He would give him ten minutes' grace, and then start off towards the great green hills lying beyond the town, Brian thought, taking a long walk before breakfast, and postponing Angelo's revelation for another opportunity. He would have been glad to hear Angelo's story; to approach more closely to the truth from Angelo's point of view, but there was time before him, and no necessity for haste. Young Salmon had possibly overslept himself, or was naturally an impunctual man; he should see him on his return, and if he waited there much longer for him—he who hated to wait, or to be kept waiting—he should certainly lose his temper, being not wholly amiable. Suddenly the click of the great brass latch of the “Masto-

don " echoed in the quiet street. Brian turned back with the expectation of meeting Angelo, and in his short-sighted fashion advanced towards the man descending the steps.

" You are behind time," he said, half sharply, before he was aware that it was not Angelo Salmon upon whom he had intruded. The effect of his appearance upon the stranger was more startling than he had bargained for. The man came to a full stop, went up two steps again in his surprise, paused and gave vent to a bitter, awful oath.

" Brian Halfday!" he said the instant afterwards, " you have been waiting here. By what right do you watch me?"

" By what right are you in this place spending the money that belongs to another?" asked Brian, sharply in his turn.

He did not explain to the man on the steps that this was one of those chance meetings with which the world is full; it might be as well, for his future plans, to profess that he knew Michael Sewell was at Scarborough, and had been waiting for him there. At all

events, in the early moments of their meeting he would not undeceive him.

The man whom we meet for the first time, and yet whose life and character have been shadowed forth by his young wife Dorcas in our pages, was a tall and strikingly handsome man—an olive-skinned, dark-eyed, gipsy-looking being, who seemed more Spanish than English at first sight. It was probable that his surprise—even his evident confusion and anger—at this unlooked for meeting with his brother-in-law, had deepened the natural colour of his skin, for after all he was not a great deal swarthier than Brian when he had recovered himself and descended to the pavement. He towered over our hero, and looked down at him almost in defiance; he had been surprised and tracked, but he was not to be browbeaten by this fierce little man whom he had always hated, and with just cause too—he was sure of that! The times had changed, and he was rich and his own master—what was Brian Half-day to him now, and, taken at his worst, what harm could he do?”

“I am spending the money that belongs to

me," he said, in reply to Brian's last remark, "and you have no right to say a word against it."

"Have you no idea of making restitution to Miss Westbrook?—is this how you carry out your promise to my sister?" asked Brian.

"You are in too much of a hurry—and I hate hurry," he replied, "I want time to turn round, and to consider how this affects me—and, by Heaven! I'll take my time too. Who has set you dogging my steps—Dorcas?"

"Is not Dorcas with you?"

"No—she is not."

"Where is she?"

Michael Sewell seemed indisposed to afford his brother-in-law the information required. His face darkened again, and the veins in his forehead became swollen with a rage that was difficult to repress. Still he repressed it. He was not at his ease in Brian's company, or under Brian's questioning; but there were reasons why he should not openly quarrel with him at present. He owed Brian Halfday a grudge, and he was a man who never forgave or forgot; but the hour of retaliation lay

beyond the present day, and he could afford to wait as well as any man. The game was his own, and he held the leading cards.

"Look here, Brian," he said, bluntly, but in a more friendly tone, "you and I have not hit it well together, and you have taken a deal of pains to make me hate you; but you'll find I'm straight and fair—if you'll leave me to myself. Cross me, and there's no one a greater devil. Ask Dorcas—ask that infernal father of hers—ask anybody who has ever known Mike Sewell. If you want me for an enemy, say so; if you want me for a friend, hold out your hand."

Brian was not to be deceived by this sudden exhibition of frankness. He believed he knew the man and estimated him at his just worth, and he had lost faith in him and his honour long ago.

"I make neither friends nor enemies if I can help it," he said, "and you and I are not likely to meet very often here, or elsewhere."

"I'll take care of that," said Michael Sewell, insolently now.

He was not at his ease, and his mood varied with every sentence of his brother-in-law's.

"I shall be glad of one interview, at your leisure," Brian continued, "for I have news of considerable importance to communicate."

"Have you been following me to tell me this?"

"Scarcely," said Brian. "My principal business in Scarborough is with Miss Westbrook herself."

"Ah!—yes—Miss Westbrook," he muttered, in a confused way that was difficult for Brian to account for; "but she does not know you are in Scarborough."

"Has she told you so?" asked Brian. "Are you acquainted with Miss Westbrook?"

"Look here," he said again, the phrase being a familiar one with him, "I am not going to be bothered by your hateful questions; I don't care to commit myself—that is, to be taken off my guard. You are too sharp a fellow for me—you always were—and I want time and patience—lots of them. I haven't been well; I have come here for a holiday—a complete change,—and not to be worried by business of importance, as you please to term it. Why," he added, with a forced laugh, "I

have not even given my right name here, so that I might enjoy a little peace."

"Not your right name," repeated Brian thoughtfully.

"I wasn't fool enough to come as Michael Sewell—the deserter too! It was not in my line to let everybody know who I was."

"Will you tell me where Dorcas is?" asked Brian quietly.

"She is in London with her father. Ah! and look here, now, I have not much time to spare," he said, drawing a new gold watch from his pocket, and consulting it attentively, "but as we have met, and before we say good-bye here—and a good riddance to each other, perhaps,—there's another little matter of importance I'll talk over with you presently, and that's this infernal father-in-law of mine. If you or Dorcas think I'm the proper person to take care of him—to be cursed with his whining and snivelling, and all his beastly ways,—you're very much mistaken. There!"

"He is with Dorcas and you?"

"At present. If he stops much longer I shall murder him," replied Mr. Sewell vin-

dictively. "You are not going to shove him upon me, I can tell you. Of all the hateful—but I shall see you again. Good morning."

He strode away in the direction of the steps that led to the sands and the valley; then turned again suddenly, as with a new thought which had come to him.

"Look here, old fellow," he said, advancing very closely to Brian once more, "least said is soonest mended between you and me. You need not tell everybody in the hotel that my name's Michael Sewell; it's a name I detest—and I don't care to be known by it in a swell place like this."

"Your complete change includes change of name also," said Brian, ironically.

"Yes, it does. I have to play the part of a gentleman here."

"I am afraid you find it a difficult impersonation."

"Never you mind. You can disgrace me, and you can make people laugh at me," he said; "but two can play at that game, remember, always. And when your sister comes, which she will presently, you will



have disgraced her, too—don't forget that."

"I will not forget anything," was Brian's answer.

Michael Sewell went his way after this, and Brian, disturbed as much as his brother-in-law by the turn which events had taken, resumed his beat in front of the hotel, and thought less of the gentleman for whom he was waiting than of the individual playing the part of a gentleman from whom he had recently parted.

He walked to the cliff railing again, and looked down at the sands, as if curious—and he was naturally curious, the reader is aware—to learn what had become of Michael Sewell, and whether a cold bath, or a walk by the seashore, was the mission which had brought the man out at so early an hour.

It was strange that he should have met him in this place; had he been superstitious, he might have seen something like destiny in it—the destiny of a retribution that it was in his power, and which it had become his duty, to bring about.

Yes; Fate, tired of persecuting Mabel Westbrook, was playing into his hands when it

brought him and Michael Sewell together by the sea ; and the heiress might step into her rights sooner than he had dreamed.

This Michael Sewell had possibly determined on a long walk ; the tide was low, and Brian, from his vantage-ground, could see the well-knit figure of his relative by marriage striding along the wet sand, and close to the water's edge, as if with the intention of cutting off the curves of the bay, by keeping as far as he could from the range of brown cliffs that stretched on beyond the Spa, towards Filey.

Through his strong glasses, which he had put on to make sure that he was not interested in the movements of a stranger, Brian saw Michael Sewell suddenly look towards the gardens of the Spa, or to the sands immediately beyond the lower entrance, raise his hat, wave his hand, and make towards a spot of colour there—a fleck of blue and white, strangely like a lady in morning costume, sauntering time away by the sea.

“An assignation ! I am not surprised,” said Brian, shrugging his shoulders as he turned away ; “he is false in everything. It is his

character, as I have always painted it—it is the man of whom I always warned poor Dorcas. Why did I watch the wretch?" he said, stamping his foot upon the ground in his new petulance; "why have I lowered myself to spy upon him, knowing what he is so well?"

Still Michael Sewell puzzled him, and enraged him. For his sister's sake, and in her service, it might be as well to learn something of the truth, to face the man, even, and accuse him of his baseness, or to make sure that he was not the arrant knave he thought him. He would descend to the seashore and confront him. He might be doing Michael Sewell an injustice, he thought more generously, as he descended the steps, and the lady might be as innocent of an intentional meeting with the ex-soldier as Michael was of meeting her. A chance acquaintance born of *table-d'hôtes*, probably; he was getting terribly suspicious of his fellow-creatures, he was not improving—Mabel Westbrook had seen that for herself only last night.

When he had reached the sands, the man, who was not surprised, was doomed to experi-

ence another shock of considerable force, for leaning against the lower wall of the Spa, peering round it nervously and eagerly, and looking in the direction which Michael Sewell had taken, was Michael Sewell's wife.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT QUITE HAPPY.

INTO the foreground of life, and of life's battles, were advancing all those in whom Brian Halfday was interested. It seemed as if the great fight was to be fought out at this garish watering-place, where Thalia reigned supremely, and the dark skirts of Melpomene were only seen fluttering at the side wings. Surely more like destiny than ever to find Dorcas Sewell there, although Brian, like a wise man, had no faith in destiny. It was his sister who believed in fate, and who turned round with a half-cry of affright, as he touched her on the shoulder.

"Brian!" she exclaimed, "what evil genius brings you here?"

Dorcas was attired in a morning costume of fashionable make. It was the first time that Brian had seen her "dressed like a lady," and he frowned a little at her "style," at the massive gold chain hanging round her neck, and attached to a gold watch at her girdle. Evidences of making free with Mabel Westbrook's property—nothing more than that—nothing more creditable, he thought—not one effort to save money for the woman who had been robbed by the Halfdays.

"Miss Westbrook's business brings me here, Dorcas," replied Brian to her; "I hope the same motive has brought you too. We have both been waiting for you."

Dorcas looked down, and wrung her hands together.

"I have been given time," she answered; "Miss Westbrook promised to have faith in me and him."

"Meaning your husband?"

"Yes."

"And what faith has the wife in Michael

Sewell, when she watches him like this?" asked Brian; "when he is unaware of her presence, and believes her to be in London with her father?"

Dorcas winced at the inquiry. The warm blood mounted to her face, and then died away, leaving her the colour of the dead.

Brian waited for an angry answer, for the old passionate outburst which was natural to her character, and which invariably followed reproof or advice, but it came not. The hands were wrung together again, and the thin lips quivered, as she replied, in a low voice,

"I did not care to be too long away from him. I wanted to see him, if even at a distance. I wanted to know what he was doing in this place without me."

"Are you jealous of him?" inquired Brian.

"I—I wasn't when I came here first—that is," she added, "not very jealous. But he was anxious to get away, and leave me to father, and he never asked me to come with him, and I—I couldn't bear it any longer."

"When did you arrive?"

"Father and I have been here a week."

"Without discovery—that is strange."

"Oh! we are not likely to be discovered," said Dorcas, with her old excitement gathering strength by degrees; "father is palsy-stricken and helpless, and I am his nurse in lodgings near the 'Mastodon.' As near as I could get them, too, so that I could see Michael from behind the window-curtains pass the door, or come out of that hateful hotel where the women make love to him unblushingly, and he is fool enough to be flattered by their leers and smiles, and think what a handsome lady-killer he is!"

She struck her hands upon the stone sea-wall of the Spa in her sudden rage, and then spread them before her face to hide a rush of tears from her companion.

"Dorcas——" began Brian, when she lowered her hands and cried—

"Oh! yes, I know what you are going to say. 'I told you so—I warned you of him—I knew how it would be!' Well, don't say it—it's a lie—you don't know anything, and I will not listen to you."

"I was about to speak in his defence, Dorcas,

"when you interrupted me," said Brian, very calmly.

Dorcas looked at him in amazement.

"*You* speak in his defence," she muttered. "Is the world coming to an end, then?"

"I wished to say, Dorcas, that you must not suspect your husband too hastily, or you will pave the way to your own unhappiness," he said, in a gentle tone that was new to the wild girl—for she was still a girl, rash and uncontrollable; "your husband is a man unaccustomed to society, vain, and easily flattered. He is not wholly ignorant; his rough manners may pass amongst some people here for a charming outspokenness; he has probably made a few friends or acquaintances, who will drop him next week as easily as he will forget them, and there is no harm done or thought on either side. It would have been better to leave him to his holiday, and wait trustfully at home for his return."

The kind words were too much for the weak woman. She broke down again, and turned her face away from him, and said—

"I couldn't, Brian, I couldn't. I did try."

"Courage—faith," said Brian, putting his arm round her; "you are a young wife, and this husband married you for love, remember."

"Is that one of your old sneers?"

"No, Dorcas," he replied; "I believe—and perhaps it is all I do believe—that Michael Sewell really loved you when we used to quarrel about him so terribly."

"But you never had faith in him."

"Well—no."

"And now you have?" she inquired wonderingly.

"I don't say that," answered Brian, "although it does not agree with my experience of human nature to think Michael Sewell a cold-blooded scamp. He may surely talk to the ladies of an hotel where everybody grins and chatters"—he was thinking of last night and Mabel Westbrook's friends now,—“without a suspicion that he is false to you. A sensible man comes here to laugh rather than to make love."

"I'm not so sure of it," said Dorcas; "and—what is he always with that woman for? Who is she? Why does she meet him in the early morning on the sands? Why are they together

on the Spa? Why are they always together? Will you tell me that?"

"I cannot explain anything, Dorcas. I was only in Yorkshire, for the first time, last night."

"Ah! then, you don't know," said his sister; "you haven't seen how he goes about with her, whilst I stay at home and break my heart. And yet he doesn't mean any harm—he always liked me—he's a good fellow; he means to do right; it's that hateful woman who is leading him on; and mark me, Brian, *I shall kill her!*"

CHAPTER IX.

A BROTHER AT LAST.

BRIAN HALFDAY had been all his life accustomed to the strange wild moods of his sister Dorcas, but he was unprepared for the intensity of hate and passion displayed in her last words. Here was something to surprise and appal him—even to confound him with the consciousness of his own poor knowledge of human nature. After all, he was no wiser than his fellow-men, and this distracted girl remained an enigma impossible to solve. She had become in her jealousy a dangerous woman, and it was no idle threat which had escaped her. Brian could not see to the end of her purpose,



or through the shadowy complications hovering about her life. What was to become of her?

He was wise enough at least to affect to disregard the bitterness of her words, and the threat which she had conveyed.

"You are looking at this through magnifying glasses," he said, "and will have a hearty laugh at your own extravagance some day. Now, Dorcas, will you take my advice for once?"

"I never cared for your advice," his sister answered sullenly.

"I am aware of it," said Brian; "but we will not talk of bygones."

He had advised her long ago to have nothing to do with Michael Sewell, but she had disregarded him and his counsel. Women generally will turn their backs on "advice gratis" when a lover is in question.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Dorcas.

"Go home quietly, and leave this to me," he replied. "Trust me even to fight my sister's battle, if it should be necessary—which is doubtful."

Dorcas looked round the sea-wall again before she answered.

"I don't say there's any harm in those two; but he has no right to go on like that," she muttered. "And if any harm comes, I am not the woman to put up with it. I belong to a family, Brian, that's revengeful, and not too particular."

"We are not a very nice family, certainly," was the dry comment of her brother.

"There they go, walking along together still. She has got her hand upon his arm. Do you see that?"

Brian could only see that Dorcas's face had assumed a greenish hue—the loiterers on the sands were beyond his range, even with his glasses.

"Let them be," he said; "it would be a miserable policy to show the woman you are jealous, and the husband you mistrust him. I will walk back with you to your house, if you can put up with my company so long."

"Very well," Dorcas assented reluctantly.

They went slowly towards the "Mastodon," Dorcas turning and looking after her husband

more than once. Brian endeavoured to distract her attention by discussing various matters foreign to the one subject weighing on her mind, but the effect was not particularly successful. He told her of his journey to America, of Peter Scone's death—without, however, mentioning the second will of Adam Halfday—of Mabel Westbrook's being at the "Mastodon," which she knew already; of Angelo Salmon's illness, and the strange means that had been adopted to work a cure in him. He was more communicative and confidential than he had ever been; he was altogether kinder and more considerate; and the change in him was too remarkable for Dorcas not to notice.

She had been answering in monosyllables to his various questions and items of news; she had been oppressed by her own thoughts; but when they had ascended the cliff, and were close upon home, she said, in dreamy wonderment—

"What has altered you so much, Brian? Why were you not always like this in the old days? I should have loved you then?"

Brian felt the reproach conveyed by the two

questions she had asked—felt that there was more than the ring of a half-truth in them. He *had* been hard and harsh in the past—if he had been right in his judgments, he had not been merciful—like the rest of the Halldays, a consideration for other people's feelings, other folk's weaknesses, had never been a strong point in his character, and Dorcas had not learnt to love him.

"I am getting older and more thoughtful, perhaps," he answered; "but does it strike you I have altered very much?"

"Very much."

"I cannot account for it—I know I am as bad-tempered as ever," he added, thinking of last night again.

"It is not every thought for yourself," said Dorcas shrewdly, if not in too complimentary a fashion; "you are not thinking always of how good and wise a man you are now."

Brian laughed.

"That is a sharp criticism, girl—but admirably near the truth. And there are times when I feel astonishingly like a fool," he said.

"You can't be in love," said Dorcas moodily

regarding him again, "it's as unlikely for you to be in love, as for——"

"As for anybody to be in love with me—exactly," said Brian, concluding the sentence in which she had stopped half way; "oh, no—it's not likely to be love, of all the miserable passions of the world. Is this your place?"

They were standing before a house in the square that faced the "Mastodon Hotel."

"Yes, from the windows on the first floor I watch him eternally, Brian. And it's no light task, God knows," she added, with a heavy sigh.

"Leave this to me for an hour or two," said Brian; "I am thinking that Michael Sewell may as well know you are in Scarborough."

"No, no," cried Dorcas, with evident alarm; "for Heaven's sake don't tell him. He would hate me for ever—he would never forgive me, Brian. You must not tell him—you will promise me not to tell him I am here—for my sake don't lower me in his eyes—pray don't!"

Once again Brian marvelled at his sister's manner, and at her sudden exhibition of excite-

ment. She distrusted her husband, but she was terribly afraid of him.

"Will you inform him yourself?—write to him in a day or two—not later."

"Anything rather than you should tell him—or he should hear it from other lips than mine," said Dorcas.

Brian considered the question for a moment.

"Very well—I will keep your secret. I have not a right to betray it, perhaps."

"Thank you, Brian, thank you," she murmured gratefully; "I am beginning to hope I have a brother at last."

"Why?"

"You are kind to me—you speak kindly."

"I have a great deal to say that you will not take kindly to, presently, Dorcas," replied Brian gravely; "but there is time before us for future arguments."

"You mean about the money," she said, with a shudder; "ah! you may reproach me, if you will, though I am very helpless now. Not," she added quickly, "that I have lost faith in Michael's doing right, or acting rightly by Miss

Westbrook. He promised me he would, and he will keep his word, I am sure of it."

"Good day—I shall see you soon."

"Will you not come upstairs and say a word to father? He is stricken down of late days. He talks about you very often."

"Not now," said Brian, "presently."

"Good-bye, then—and please don't tell Michael."

She held her face up to him, and he stooped and kissed her, as he had not done since she was a little child—so far apart had the hearts of these two unsympathetic beings drifted in their way. He crossed the square and went towards the hotel, thinking it all over again, and striving vainly to see the end of it.

"If it had been anyone save Michael Sewell," he said to himself, "there might have been more hope for his wife."

CHAPTER X.

THE BIG BLONDE.

THE affairs of life were becoming complicated for Brian Halfday, and there was a greater pressure of business upon him than he had bargained for. He was a man with more missions than one, and they crossed and recrossed each other very strangely. First and greatest of all tasks was his duty to Mabel Westbrook—to bring back to her estate all the money of which she had been deprived had seemed the one aim of his existence, until he had found her betrothed to Angelo Salmon, linked to a weak-minded eccentricity, whom he was sure she did not love, and whom she had

accepted out of pity. To save her rather than her money in the first place—and then to confront this Michael Sewell with the tidings that he was not heir to the estate of Adam Halfday of St. Lazarus. To save Angelo Salmon also from the keen anguish of the disappointment that must come to him, to render him more man-like and self-confident, was scarcely an impossible task with time before him, Brian thought; but time was hemming him in quickly, and here was a jealous woman in hiding from her husband on his hands as well—a woman who would adopt desperate means to assert her rights against anyone who came between her and the man she loved. Yes, he had enough to do—and he did not quite see in which direction to begin. He must watch his opportunity, for the sakes of all these people who had got upon his mind, and ousted his profession from his thoughts.

At the *table-d'hôte* breakfast at the “Mastodon,” he saw nothing of his friends or acquaintances—it was on the Spa that they flocked towards him or swept by him, atoms of the busy crowd of fashion and frivolity.

Mabel and Angelo came towards him first,

and his heart sank a little—was it with envy?—as they approached him arm-in-arm. Angelo Salmon presented a less ghastly appearance in the sunshine, or the breeze had freshened him up for the morning, or in Mabel Westbrook's company, and with Mabel to take care of, he had become a different man. And she was bright and full of smiles also—hardly the woman engaged against her will, Brian thought discontentedly, although a vainer man might have taken her smiles to himself, and considered that she was glad to see him again.

Mabel and Brian shook hands, and then Brian and Angelo, the latter proving that he possessed a memory still, by saying at once,

"I owe you an apology, Mr. Halfday, for not keeping my appointment this morning. I hope you did not wait for me."

"Not a great while," was Brian's answer.

"I did not wake. The man who had orders to call me received fresh instructions from my father to let me be—so I trust you will excuse me. They," he added, with a half-frown, "treat me very much like a child, you perceive. Even this dear, good friend—this wife that is to

be—talks to me as if I were a boy of ten years old. That will not do much longer, Mabel,” he said, looking into her face with so much love and admiration expressed that Brian was half disposed to feel indignant again. It was an extraordinary thing that he could not bear anybody to smile at Mabel but himself; he had no idea he was so selfish as that—it was perfectly unaccountable; he must be just waking to the consciousness that his temper was execrable.

“I hope Scarborough pleases you better in the daylight?” said Mabel to our hero.

“It is a place that will never please me,” he replied; “I am too quiet, or too morose, or too fond of my own company.”

“I don’t like it myself,” said Angelo, “but they keep me here for some reason or other—for the sake of the change, I think they call it. As if change were necessary with Mabel for companion!”

“Shall I leave you two gentlemen to talk scandal against a fashionable watering-place?” said Mabel. “I perceive a friend approaching

whom I have almost deserted during the last two days."

"You will not be long away from me?" said Angelo.

"You will find me near the band," answered Mabel.

There was design in her departure, Brian thought; and Mabel certainly considered that it would be better for Angelo to tell his story, or that part of his story which might be of interest to Brian, as speedily as possible. Brian would understand Angelo and herself more thoroughly then, she hoped.

But Angelo Salmon was not in a hurry to commence his narrative. He sat down by the side of Brian, and followed Mabel with his eyes—watched her cross the promenade to address a lady and gentleman, stop and talk to them for awhile, and finally proceed with them in the direction of the orchestra. Brian had been watching also with immense interest, for the lady was strikingly attired in blue and white, and the gentleman was Michael Sewell. The costumes are more striking than picturesque at Scarborough, as a rule, and there are as violent



dashes at colours and contrasts as in the garish habits of an opera-bouffe. Hence there are a few happy results, and many terrible failures—although it was doubtful if the blue and white dress were a failure, despite the attention it attracted, and men and women looking curiously after it and its wearer. It was a marvel of skirts, under-skirts, and flouncings, we may observe, and the lady within it was large, fair, young, and pretty enough to carry off with something like grace a dress that would have been social annihilation to a doll or a dowdy.

The wearer of the blue and white was a fine woman, and knew it, and was perfectly aware that the world in general was of the same opinion as herself. Brian scowled again; it was another blow to him to think that Mabel Westbrook had made the acquaintance of Michael Sewell and his companion. Mabel was too quick to make friends, and her amiability had been imposed upon in consequence.

“Who is the lady, Angelo?” asked Brian sharply.

“The lady?—what lady? I beg your

pardon if you have been speaking before—I did not hear you,” said Angelo, jumping at the suddenness of Brian’s address.

“Who is the lady Miss Westbrook has shaken hands with?”

“Mrs. Disney—a young widow. I don’t admire her,” said Angelo.

“Does Mabel Westbrook admire her?”

“I cannot say; she always fires up if one utters a word against her friends, and I like her for that, as I like her for everything. There is not such another woman in the world, Brian!” he cried, enthusiastically.

“Exactly. Mrs. Disney is her friend, then?”

“They were schoolfellows together; Mrs. Disney was educated in America. When Mabel left Penton, she found out Mrs. Disney, who was very kind to her, and made her share her home at once.”

“Oh! this is the school friend—the one friend in England of whom I have heard her speak. I wish it had been one friend the less,” he muttered to himself.

“Mabel came to Scarborough with Mrs. Disney, and I found her here after a long

search. I was determined to find her; I had made up my mind to die, and I thought I should be glad to see her again before I left a world in which I had lost all hope."

"That was a foolish resolution, Angelo," said Brian; "you should have been a prouder and braver man than that. There are plenty of women to love in the world, and there are life's duties before women."

It was his first step towards the end he had in view, and Angelo Salmon considered the remark for a moment.

"You do not know how completely prostrated I was, and what a blank everything was too. I should not care to live without Mabel—I would not!" Angelo said, stamping his foot upon the ground.

"It is a morbid feeling; you have no right to think of anyone in that way," said Brian. "You will have different and better thoughts as you grow stronger."

"I don't want to think of anything but Mabel. She is my one thought."

"I am sorry for it," said Brian bluntly.

Angelo looked intently at his companion.

"Have you ever been in love yourself?"

"I don't know—I can't say. I have a remembrance of a school-girl whom I met in half-holidays, and once went nutting with, and who promised to marry me when I grew up. But she didn't."

"If you have never cared for anyone—I mean cared deeply—it is beyond your power to understand me, sir," said Angelo, in a half-offended tone.

Brian assented readily.

"Perhaps it is," he said; "let us change the subject."

He saw quickly and shrewdly that Angelo's variable moods were difficult to oppose, and he felt already that the young man, who had been hitherto meek and docile, was as irritable and suspicious as himself.

"Do you remember my asking you to be my friend?" Angelo asked suddenly.

"Yes; in the Museum at Penton; and I answered like a churl," said Brian.

"I thought—she thought—that I could not have a better; there seemed something so strong, and manly, and straightforward in you

—but,” he added, with a shiver, “I could not take you for a friend now.”

“Have I altered so much?”

“I have taken a dislike to you,” was Angelo’s candid reply.

“Well, I regret that; for I would make you my friend, if I could.”

“You have tried to make me think less of the woman I love—and I cannot forgive that very readily, Mr. Halfday,” said Angelo, with great gravity; “you must have had some hidden reason for endeavouring to disparage Mabel in my eyes.”

“I would not say a word of disparagement against Mabel Westbrook for the world,” replied Brian; “but I would, for all that, beg you to love her with less selfishness.”

“What can you possibly mean?” cried Angelo.

“I have already told you that no woman is deserving of, and that no good woman expects to be made, the sole thought of a man’s life. It is unnatural and unreal; and harm may come of it.”

“I would prefer not continuing the discus-

sion," said Angelo loftily, as he rose from his chair, took his hat formally from his head, and left Brian to ponder on the non-success—even the utter failure—of his first attempt to rescue Mabel from the clutches of this man.

"Still it must be done," he said; "he is worse than I thought; and she would be hardly safe with him."

He sat there brooding on this problem, until Michael Sewell, Mrs. Disney, and Mabel passed again; when he half rose to his feet, as if with the intention of joining them, and then sat down again.

"No—I will not hunt her to death. She is happier without me," he muttered.

As they passed, and Mabel looked towards him and smiled, he could almost fancy that her glance asked him to rescue her from those people, whom she had sought of her own free will, and had possibly tired of speedily; but he had not the vanity to construe her meaning thus, and contented himself with raising his hat, and feeling grateful for her acknowledgment of his existence. They passed on, and Brian looked after them, until he became aware that his sister

Dorcas was looking after them too, from the upper gallery of the covered corridor which faced him. Ever the same thought and the same eternal watch for this woman of one idea—the sooner husband and wife were together, or Mrs. Disney separated from Michael Sewell, the better. This task seemed possible at last. Dorcas was thickly veiled now, and Brian would scarcely have recognized her, despite his glasses, had it not been for the preceding interview. But Dorcas was on his mind, and there was no mistaking the figure leaning over the balcony.

Dorcas did not see him. She had only eyes for Michael Sewell and his companion; and when Mabel left them and came on alone towards Brian, she did not look towards her, but shifted her position with the movements of her husband in the crowd. Presently Brian lost her altogether, and was gladdened suddenly • by the sight of Mabel standing before him.

“What have you done with Angelo?” she asked.

“He left me a few minutes since, being heartily tired of my society,” said Brian.

"I will go in search of him."

"I will accompany you, if you will allow me."

"Certainly," said Mabel.

"I have one or two questions to ask concerning Mrs. Disney," said Brian; adding, as Mabel regarded him with surprise, "and in Mrs. Disney's interest."

"Mrs. Disney should be very much obliged to you," Mabel answered.

"Oh! I am not going to quarrel with you again," said Brian with a half sad smile; "I think I understand you now, and for ever."

"Well, well," she said, in a lower tone, and looking away from him for an instant, "it is almost time."

"Young Salmon tells me Mrs. Disney is a dear friend of yours," Brian began.

"He is mistaken," Mabel answered, "a dear friend Isabel Disney can never be. She is an old schoolfellow, whom I sought when I found myself alone in the world—whose knowledge of the world, too, I fancied might be of service to me in some way. That was one of my mis-

takes—I make them at times, as you are aware.”

“You do not like Mrs. Disney. I am glad of that,” exclaimed Brian.

“On the contrary, I like her very much—as an acquaintance,” was the reply. “She is very amiable, very kind, very anxious to be of service, very generous——”

“And very vain,” Brian concluded.

“How do you know?” asked Mabel.

“I don’t know, but the idea has impressed me, nevertheless.”

Mabel laughed.

“Well, I think she is ‘just a little’ vain,” Mabel confessed; “not much—not enough to spoil her. She is very pretty and dashing, and gentlemen pay her a great deal of attention, and that is likely to turn the head of a young lady who is as fond of admiration as the rest of us.”

“I wish you would not talk quite so flippantly on subjects of importance, Miss Westbrook,” Brian jerked out solemnly. “You are not fond of admiration or attention.”

"I am only a woman," answered Mabel demurely. "I think I am, Mr. Halfday."

"No—no, not in the way I mean," said Brian; "not the fulsome admiration and attention which that big blonde would take for a compliment."

"What a name, 'that big blonde!'" cried Mabel. "If she could hear you; if her new and last admirer could hear you!"

"The gentleman with whom she is walking, you mean?"

"Yes. Captain Seymour."

"Oh! that is Captain Seymour," said Brian. "Do *you* like him?"

"Well—no. He is very handsome, but very rough in his manners."

"Hardly a gentleman?"

"No—hardly a gentleman," repeated Mabel; "but Isabel likes his frankness, and he is certainly very attentive to her—possibly very fond of her."

"Don't say that," said Brian very quickly.

"Why not?" asked Mabel in astonishment.

"Why should he not be? Do you know anything of him—is he what he seems?"

“No,” was Brian’s reply.

“What is he, then?”

“My sister’s husband,” answered Brian.

CHAPTER XI.

CLOSE TO THE TRUTH.

MABEL WESTBROOK turned very white, before a flush of honest indignation at Michael Sewell's duplicity stole over her face and neck. Young and guileless herself, knowing little of the world and the world's temptations, crediting humanity with higher motives than as a rule it deserved, believing in the good, and doubting if there were much evil in men's hearts, the revelation of Brian Halfday was a blow to Mabel from which she did not readily recover.

"Oh! is it true—can it be true?" she exclaimed.



"It is unfortunately too true."

"Let us get away from this crowd," she said with excitement. "I am bewildered; I shall betray my confusion. You must tell me what to do."

"What to do!"

"Yes, for Isabel. For oh! Brian, I—I think she likes him very much already."

"And has no idea he is married?"

"No. She is vain, but not wicked. She has not a bad thought in her simple heart, I am certain."

"She will the more readily get over this folly," said Brian.

They went slowly from the promenade to the paths which wound up the steep hills of the Spa Gardens, where they could talk in peace, and with only a few stragglers to wonder what might be the subject of their conversation.

"Now tell me what to do. I can rely upon you," said Mabel, when they were on one of the upper paths, and not far from the summit of the cliff.

"Thank you for the compliment," answered

Brian, with a smile. "I have given you in my time a great deal of advice, which I have no remembrance of your following."

"Go on. You regard matters lightly. I have a friend's reputation at stake," said Mabel impatiently.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Westbrook. This is reproof for reproof, I suppose; but I hardly deserve it. But why should we not treat the matter lightly?" he asked: "Michael Sewell has been flirting with your friend, and has not told her he is married. Mrs. Disney has been a little indiscreet in accepting attentions from a gentleman of whose antecedents she is in ignorance, and a quiet hint from you sets right the position. Where is the harm done? The widow is not likely to be desperately in love. Her vanity may have been flattered by a handsome young man's attentions, but I should doubt if her heart has been touched in the least."

"I am not so sure. Love is a plant of quick growth in the hearts of most women, I have been told."

"Quick-growing plants wither quickly," said

Brian in reply. "The weed grows apace, is torn up by the roots, and thrown aside—and there's an end of it."

"I had forgotten your opinion of women," said Mabel, half indignantly, half sorrowfully. "But this Michael Sewell is dangerous."

"To anyone with a fair share of common sense," Brian answered, "he is obtrusive and vulgar."

"Why is he here without Dorcas? Why does he come under a false name to the 'Mastodon,' and with a title to which he has no right?"

"I am not defending Michael Sewell," replied Brian. "He is no friend of mine. In twenty-four hours from this time he will constitute himself my bitterest enemy."

Mabel drew a quick breath of alarm, and looked anxiously at Brian.

"He will not think you have told me," she said.

"Probably he will, but I am not alluding to that. He knows I am likely to study Dorcas's interest before his own; and if I understand the gentleman, he will treat the whole matter

as an excellent jest,—when he is found out, not before.”

“Why do you think he will consider himself your bitterest enemy?”

“Will you allow me to reply to that question twenty-four hours hence also?”

“For what reason?” Mabel inquired.

“It concerns you—it relates to the old, objectionable topic of your money,” said Brian.

“Yes,” replied Mabel thoughtfully, “I can afford to wait for any explanation of that; but,” she added, with greater interest, “you are not going to quarrel with him—to place yourself in vain opposition to him—to do harm rather than good by setting yourself up as my champion? I promised your sister Dorcas to wait patiently—to have faith in her—and you must not interfere.”

“Suppose I am studying my own interests, and not yours?”

“Ah! now you speak in the old aggravating, enigmatical way. I will not suppose anything half so ridiculous as that,” said Mabel, pouting a little.

“Ridiculous—do you say ridiculous? I think

at least——” he came to a full stop, and then went on in a different tone, “but I am never going to be angry with you again. There—you may say what you like!”

“Thank you very much,” said Mabel drily.

“Shall we change the subject, and go in search of Mrs. Disney?”

“Mrs. Disney I shall not see till luncheon,” said Mabel; “but we may as well return to the promenade.”

“I do not see any particular reason for that,” replied Brian. “I hate promenades and mobs of people with fine dresses to show off.”

“Angelo will wonder where I am—he——”

“Confound Angelo!” exclaimed Brian in a higher key, despite himself; “last night you spoke as if you were afraid of him, and doubtful of the result of this foolish step—you must pardon me, but it was a very foolish step—which you had taken at his friend’s advice—and now you are scarcely happy out of his sight.”

“He is my charge,” was Mabel’s reply, “for the present. He is still weak and strange, and only I have any influence over him. I might

add, without much vanity, perhaps, that *he* at least is unhappy out of my sight, terribly unlike his old self, but after your hard words I shall say no more, Mr. Halfday. Please conduct me back to the promenade."

"Yes—one minute," said Brian. "I have said something rude again, and hurt your feelings as usual. But you spoke of the man as if——"

"Well—as if?" demanded Mabel imperiously.

"As if you loved him," Brian answered, "and that vexed me."

"I do not see why it should vex you in any way," said Mabel, with a charming assumption of ignorance that a man more versed in woman's wiles would have seen through quickly, and seized his advantage from.

"Everything that relates to you affects me seriously," replied Brian, very grave and stern under the misapprehension of her manner, "and you know, or should know, that as well as I do. I have attempted no disguise; you have. Every time I meet you there arises something to perplex me with your character, and bewilder me with your remarks. You won-

der why I should be vexed at your speaking as if you loved Angelo Salmon. Why—you have no right to love him!”

“Have I not a right to love whom I please?”

“Certainly not,” said Brian emphatically; “you should be—I believe you are—above all professions of attachment for people you don’t care for.”

“But I do care for Angelo—in a way, that is.”

“Yes, in a way! But how would the man who loves you with his whole soul—whom you love, for you have almost owned it—think of the miserable and mistaken position you have assumed?”

“What man can you possibly mean?” exclaimed Mabel, becoming very red on the instant.

“What man? Great Heaven, what a question! Are you laughing at me? have you gone out of your mind too?” cried Brian, in his profound astonishment.

“I hope not; but I don’t know what you mean. I must be unaccountably dull this morning. Will it please you to enlighten me?”

"The dry-goods fellow in the backwoods somewhere, whom you are not treating well, if you love him at all. Which you owned to me you did, mind!" said Brian with severity.

Mabel coloured again, but her eyes looked up at the blue sky, and then along the path they were pursuing in their slow progress downwards to the promenade; and finally, to Brian's increased surprise and vexation, she burst into a peal of merry laughter, which echoed pleasantly and musically amongst the trees. It was a momentary forgetfulness of the shadows that were about her life, that might be stealing from the lower ground like a mist that would envelop the lives of others presently, and wherein others might be lost; but she was young, naturally light-hearted, and the humour of the position and the studied gravity of Brian Halfday were too much for her. She laughed from the heart, as a girl should at her age, but it was the last laugh for many a long day.

"I don't see the joke," said Brian shortly.

"I cannot very well explain," was Mabel's

answer; "there is a mistake somewhere, I think."

"There is no one in America whom you would marry if he asked you—whom you could love in good time—who you are sure loves you?" he asked.

"Not one," answered Mabel, confidently.

"Have I been dreaming all this while?" said Brian; "was it a fiction designed to mislead me?"

"Not so bad as that."

"Believing in what you said to me, I betrayed the secret of my own heart," said Brian, "for I felt hope was gone for ever after you had once loved."

"I simply said there was some one whom I might learn to love one day," said Mabel; "was there anything very remarkable in that?"

"A man in the backwoods."

"Ay—very far back indeed!"

"If I had only dreamed you were jesting on that night respecting the man I fancied you loved—I should have been very glad. I should have acted in a different fashion."

"I don't see why you should have done so."

"You were not in love with a dry-goods man—a backwoodsman—any one in America, then? Tell me that?"

"Literally speaking—no," answered Mabel; "but you must not ask too——"

"And you have never loved Angelo Salmon?" he cried. "It is all out of pity for him that——"

"Pray don't say any more," said Mabel, interrupting him in her turn, and becoming very much afraid of him. "I don't care—I don't wish—to reply to further questioning. I will not."

"You shall!" he exclaimed; "for I must learn the truth, and be crushed under foot, or raised to Heaven by a word. I love you, Mabel. You know it—you have known it all along. Oh! my darling, to be lost for ever, or to be won now. I love you—I love you!"

It was a fitting place for the avowal under the still, green trees that shadowed the winding paths of the Spa Gardens, where love-making is not particularly uncommon; it was the fitting time for it to two hearts that had been slowly and surely approaching each other from the



first, in spite of every misconception ; it was the genuine outburst of a pent-up soul that no woman could mistake. It was the strong love of a strong man, whose pride had given way, and whose passion had mastered his reserve.

Mabel looked away, trembled and shed tears, but she did not shrink from him as he passed his arm for an instant round her waist. This was her first love, and she only wondered that he had not seen it long ago ; for this had been her hero from the early days of his unselfish thoughts of her.

“Don’t say any more, Brian,” she murmured ;
“let me think a little.”

“I have not made you unhappy?”

“No.”

“Happy, then? say that, Mabel—just one word.”

“Yes, I am happy now,” she answered.

He kissed her very hastily and clumsily—not being used to kissing—but he was very happy, also, and forgot the world ahead of him, as he drew her arm through his, and walked down with her very proudly towards the band—that

was playing a triumphal march, as if in compliment to his victory.

Two men followed them, but Brian and Mabel were unconscious of watchers, or of anyone existing, just then, in the world, save themselves : such is the selfishness of the human heart when a man or woman is stowed away at its core.

"What did I tell you?" said Michael Sewell to Angelo, as they stood on the higher ground, looking down at the lovers ; "what else could you expect?"

"Yes—what could I expect?" repeated Angelo.

CHAPTER XII.

VAIN BELIEF.

THE truth had come into the foreground at last—the foreground of eternal sunshine, in the estimation of this pair of lovers—and there were to be no more mistakes, hard words, or quarrellings. Life was opening fairly for them now that they understood each other for all time—now that the old, old passion ever young had given them wings to soar into the region of romance. They were very happy, and very forgetful—full of wonder that each had not understood the other completely from the first—full of dreamy, blissful speculation, even as to how it had come about after all. They did not descend to the promenade, but turned off at

the back of the music-room and went upwards again by fresh winding paths along which they strolled together, talking of the past as it had been, and of the future as they hoped it might be. This was the happiest morning of their two young lives, and shadow-land lay far away from them.

"I must get back to the 'Mastodon' now, Brian," said Mabel; "the band has ceased playing."

"I am going to the 'Mastodon' too," replied Brian, drawing a little hand more closely through his arm, "and am not likely to say good morning till I get there."

"Yes—but Angelo."

"Ah! poor Angelo," said Brian, "what is to be done? There must be no more humouring that delusion, even for his sake."

"I don't know what to do," said Mabel, very helplessly.

"Leave him to me," replied Brian; "refer him to me for an explanation, and I will tell him the whole truth."

"No, Brian," said Mabel, "he will hear the whole truth more patiently from me, I think."

"I think it very likely," was Brain's answer; "and when will you tell him?"

"When I have considered which is the kindest and best way. I should not like to dash him down again—to undo all the good that has been done. He was always so kind and thoughtful for others when he was strong."

"Yes," responded Brian, "he is to be considered. Take your own time—we must not act in too much haste, after all."

"And you will not be jealous?"

"That is not likely," Brian said; "you and I can always trust each other."

"Surely."

"Though what you meant about that dry-goods man——"

"Shall I tell you who was the dry-goods man in my thoughts that night?" said Mabel; "is it necessary to confess as much?" asked Mabel archly.

"Ah!" cried Brian, "it was I! to be sure—and the fossils were the dry goods—I see it all. My dear Mabel!" And Mabel's hat and feather were suddenly knocked out of all consistency of detail.



"There, Brian, that will do. For goodness sake," cried Mabel, "I hear the leaves rustling, as if some one were in the bushes behind us."

"I can't help it," Brian confessed, "I am so dreadfully happy—I never was happy before—I don't believe I ever guessed what happiness was like till to-day. What a cross-grained, crotchety, ill-tempered, bad sort of fellow I have been all my life, Mabel."

"No—no. You have been always generous, and thoughtful for others, and disregardful of yourself," said Mabel, "and that made me think of you too much when the truth came to me at Datchet Bridge."

"Ah! but you threw me terribly off my guard with the backwoods."

"I—I was afraid you would guess my secret."

"And then to send me back my thousand pounds."

"Which was of less use to me than to you, Brian," she answered, "please do not say anything more about it, for my sake."

"For your sake—everything!"

Thus they wandered slowly homewards with

full hearts, and Brian Halfday did not recollect until he had parted with her that he had not told her of his voyage to America, of his discovery that there might accrue to her some little salvage from the bank-wreck, of the last will of Adam Halfday, of Dorcas's being in Scarborough with her father. He should have a great deal to tell her presently, when he had sobered down—he would not have a single secret from her,—no one in the world knew so well as himself that she was always to be trusted. He would not begin his new, bright life with any mysteries between them. It would be unworthy of his new love, or rather of that old love which had taken a mighty strength to itself, and beaten down all the barriers that had lain between him and the way to Mabel's heart.

He parted with Mabel at the bridge which crossed the valley, and she returned alone, after all, and at her own wish, to the hotel. She was nervous concerning Angelo still, he saw, and it was natural, considering the mistake that had been made. Yes, it had been a mistaken kindness altogether, Brian considered, and he turned

back into the Spa to reflect once more upon the best course to pursue for the sake of those whose conflicting interests, or opposing loves, must clash in a few hours. If in any way he could soften the shock of the battle—and the battle must come—he would be very glad.

Presently, and with these thoughts upon his mind, he went out of the gardens by the upper gates, and into the road upon the cliff. He would take one of his long walks before he returned to the hotel—he had told Mabel that he should do so—and thereby afford her time to recover her composure before he met her at dinner. Very probably a solution to the problem of the life about him would suggest itself during his sharp walk; he had thought out many problems in the course of those pedestrian excursions to which he had been accustomed. He could lunch on his road with more comfort than at the long table in the dining-room of the "Mastodon," and Mabel would be grateful for the self-restraint which had taken him away from her for a few hours. If, when he returned, he could tell her that he had seen a way to apprise Angelo of the truth without crushing him



utterly, she would be as glad as he was. He buttoned his coat, and set forth at a brisk pace along the higher ground, with the sea-breeze blowing in his face, and fluttering his black mane. He went away with strong hopes in his heart, where there was peace at last, and a sense of happiness, which, as he had already owned to Mabel, he had never known before in all his solitary existence. He went away believing that life's troubles were at an end with him, when they were closing round him thick and fast. He believed in the day, and the night's darkness was at hand in which to submerge him.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON DEFENCE.

THERE are a certain number of fair women in the world—not a very large number, let us hope—who are doomed from the beginning to the end of their lives to be insufferably silly; to whom no experience gives wisdom, or caution, or the common prudence which a child might possess, but who, led on blindly by their vanity, or love of admiration and applause, pass on to their own discomfiture and humiliation, only to act their parts over again when the opportunity to show how foolish they are presents itself once more. Isabel Disney belonged to this class to a certainty. A good-looking, soft-hearted, soft-headed woman, with



a passion for praise, and a strong belief that mankind in general was rhapsodizing over her beauty, she had flirted her way through life without much thought for anyone save herself, and those various lovers and half-lovers, who had pottered round her, talked nonsense, made eyes, and disappeared. She had been a nuisance to her husband, without a thought of rendering him unhappy; and after his death—for which she had not appeared to be particularly sorry—she had been a refined nuisance to respectable society, who knew there was no harm in her, tolerated her accordingly, and laughed at her not a little.

She was handsome, and big enough to attract the admirers of the colossal; she was rich enough to be worth securing for the sake of her railway shares and foreign bonds; and she was just shrewd enough not to throw herself and her possessions away on the first man who expressed a desire to secure them. She liked her liberty, although she believed she had been desperately in love some thirty or forty times, and invariably with the wrong man, who had loved some one else, or fled for his life at a

critical period of their acquaintance. Steeped in the romance of the circulating libraries, she took existence in strong drams, and made heroes from the most indifferent materials, after the fashion of her kind.

Mabel Westbrook had no great fears for the result of breaking the news of Michael Sewell's perfidy—if perfidy it can be called—to “the big blonde.” It had been a stronger flirtation than ordinary, considering that only ten days had elapsed since “Captain Seymour” had put in an appearance at the “Mastodon;” and Mrs. Disney had sighed more heavily, talked more nonsense in confidence to Mabel, than she was generally accustomed to do when the new lover had presented his credentials. But the acquaintance was not of long date; and Mrs. Disney's feelings, though exuberant, were evaporative, and all would be well when the next man came smirking round the corner.

Hence, immediately after luncheon, Mabel broke the news of Captain Seymour's position to her friend, and hoped that Isabel was prepared to shake her last admirer from her thoughts as easily as she had done the rest of

her followers. Mabel did not state who was her informant—she had very strong reasons for not telling everything to the widow,—but she spoke as earnestly and kindly as though Isabel Disney had met with her first love, and was going to die at the loss of him. Mabel had met with her own, and could be graphic and sympathetic in her friend's interest.

The result of the disclosure was hardly satisfactory. Mrs. Disney flew into a passion in lieu of bursting into tears. She did not believe a word of the revelation, and Mabel had allowed herself to be imposed upon by some one who was jealous—madly and wickedly jealous, she was sure—of the preference that had been shown to the vilified Captain. As if anyone would treat her so, or deceive her in so cruel a manner as Mabel had suggested! As if a man could pay her the most unmistakable attentions, and look the most unutterable affection, with a wife, and perhaps a family, somewhere in the background. It was not natural—it was not possible. She had the fullest confidence in Captain Seymour, and the malignancy of his rivals was not going to shatter

it at one blow. She would be true to him under good report or evil report, and she did not thank Mabel Westbrook for disseminating, though even in her interest, the idle scandal of the place. She would see Captain Seymour, and tell him that there were enemies at work against him; she would not be able to rest until he had denied the accusations in his usual frank, forcible manner. She would be glad to be left to herself for an hour or two, when she would be better and stronger and calmer, her feelings being at present suggestive of a strong desire to tear something or somebody to pieces.

When Mabel had gone, she drank some sherry and water, shed a few tears, dressed herself with scrupulous exactness, and sent her maid downstairs for the Army and Navy lists, which she had seen in the coffee-room, and where she certainly discovered one or two Captain Seymours, as Michael Sewell was perfectly aware when he had seized upon the title as handy and safe. Finally she went in search of Captain Seymour—who was easily found,—took a walk with him on the terrace of the

hotel, and burst into the facts of the case with considerable energy and volubility.

Captain Seymour—or Michael Sewell, as we prefer to call him—heard the particulars with a fair amount of composure, but became fierce and excitable afterwards. He denied the statement; he pronounced it to be a vile fabrication; he swore to denounce and hold up to shame the villain who had thus basely traduced him; he dashed from the terrace as if in search of him, and after wandering about the hotel for half an hour, and making many inquiries for Mr. Brian Halfday, he locked himself in his room, and was seen no more that afternoon.

Mrs. Disney told the story of Michael's emphatic denial of all accusations against him to our heroine, and demanded loftily, and too melodramatically for Mabel's taste, the name of the informant.

"I will tell you presently," said Mabel; "I must have time to think how this denial will affect him."

"Has he sworn you to secrecy?"

"No."

"It's that odious Angelo Salmon, I am sure."

"Angelo is almost a friend of Captain Seymour's, and has every confidence in him at present."

"You have no right to keep back the name of the slanderer," said Mrs. Disney; "you are not acting fairly in the matter."

"I think I am," said Mabel calmly, "for I know how truly I can believe every word that has been told me in your interest. When I see you again, he may be with me to speak for himself."

"I'll let him have a piece of my mind if he is," said Mrs. Disney.

"Meanwhile let me warn you, Isabel—let me beg you to keep on your guard."

"I have not lived six-and-twenty years not to know how to take care of myself," said the widow haughtily; "although I feel that this warning, like your last, is untimely and unnecessary. Mabel, I am terribly disappointed in you."

"I am sorry," said Mabel.

The two young women separated once more, and Mabel went away distressed in mind at her friend's obduracy. She was glad that she had

not mentioned Brian Halfday's name in the matter; she would leave it for Brian to take further action. She was afraid of Michael Sewell now—she did not know in what way a man might act who was capable of assuming a position to which he was not entitled—who was absent from his wife, and paying attention as a single man to a young widow. This was a new and foggy world to her, but she saw no danger through the mist—and she knew perfectly well that Isabel Disney, despite her heroics, was already on her guard. She could afford to let time bring round the truth.

But time was bringing round more truths than one, and with a rapidity for which she was wholly unprepared. She had stolen to her room to think of all that had happened that day—of the great event in her life which was for ever changed and strengthened by her Brian's love—when a gentle tapping at the door distracted her attention from day-dreams.

"If you please, Miss Westbrook," said the voice of one of the maid-servants of the hotel, "I have a letter for you."

Mabel opened the door, and received a note

in the handwriting of Angelo Salmon. It was written in pencil, and had been given to the servant to deliver.

"I am to wait for an answer, if you please," said the maid.

"One moment, then."

Mabel broke the seal with a consciousness of impending trouble or doubt. Had the crisis come already, with Brian away, and she a weak woman unprepared for defence? She opened the note and read one hurried line without preface or signature. "*I am waiting in the Hall. Come to me. I must see you,*" was all that was written on the paper. It was certainly Angelo's writing, and it presaged the coming of the truth of which she had been afraid.

"Tell Mr. Salmon I will be down in five minutes."

She put on her hat and mantle—it might be as well to take him from the hotel on to the quiet cliffs, or into the Spa gardens again, or along the sands—anywhere out of the reach of the hundred ears eternally pricked up, and listening.

She descended the stairs with a beating heart,

but with a new sense of courage gathering strength within her.

“After all, he had better hear the truth from me,” she said to herself, “if the time has come to tell him.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WHOLE TRUTH.

MABEL WESTBROOK found Angelo Salmon waiting for her in the great hall of the "Mastodon," with his wan face turned towards the stairs down which he knew she must descend to him. When he saw her approaching he rose and bowed with great politeness, almost with grave reverence.

"I am glad you have come," he said; "I thought you would not perhaps."

"Is there any reason why I should be afraid to meet you, Angelo?"

"There may be a reason why you should not care to meet me now," he said; "but I will explain as soon as I can. It is not worth

while misunderstanding each other any longer, is it?"

"A complete understanding may tend to the peace of mind of both of us," Mabel replied. "I have thought so more than once."

"Impossible."

"I hope it will, Angelo—I pray it will," said Mabel, earnestly.

He looked away from her. The tears were in his eyes, and his lips were quivering like a child's, for he was very weak. Was he to be treated as a child, too? Mabel thought in some respects that it might be wiser policy. She put her hand upon his arm, and said,

"Take me, Angelo, where we can speak straightforwardly and fearlessly to one another."

"Very well."

They went out of the hotel together, and towards the Spa, until Angelo stopped and shuddered,

"Not in those hateful gardens," he said.

"Shall we cross the bridge and get on the cliff yonder, or shall we descend to the valley?"

"There are less people down there, perhaps," he said moodily.

They descended to the valley, and went silently for awhile along the path there. The Ramsdale valley has never been a favourite resort of the Scarborough visitors, and there were only a few nursemaids and children strolling through the lower grounds. When they were seated on a rustic garden seat, shut in almost by the trees, Angelo startled his companion with a strange and sudden laugh.

"They who pass here will take us for lovers, Mabel," he exclaimed. "What a hideous mistake! And yet," he added, very sadly, "we were lovers only yesterday—before he came."

"Before who came?"

"You know," he answered. "It's unworthy of you to affect ignorance; it is unfair to me."

"Are you speaking of Mr. Halfday?" asked Mabel, after this reproof.

"Yes—of the man whom I shall never forgive, who takes his place as my deadly foe."

"You will not think so when I have told you all," said Mabel.

"I am his bitterest enemy," said Angelo,

with a violent excitement exhibiting itself. "I warn him to beware of me."

"What has he done?"

"Told you that he loved you," answered Angelo boldly, "put his arm round you—my God! kissed you. I saw and heard everything; I watched, as a man cruelly deceived by a woman to whom he has given his whole heart has a right to watch. And to think that you—Oh, Mabel, Mabel, why did you act like this to me?"

He put his hand before his face and cried bitterly. It was a childish grief, but it was terrible for Mabel to witness, and beyond her power to subdue. Listening to his deep, heavy sobs, it was difficult for her to believe that she was wholly blameless. Had she had time to consider, had not Brian's love been so suddenly confessed, she might have asked for Angelo's confidence and trust before instead of afterwards. But it was too late, and here was the result.

"Angelo," she said, very kindly and earnestly, "do not say I have cruelly deceived you, or I shall never have a happy moment again."

"You have never cared for me," he replied; "you have suffered yourself to be engaged to me; since the engagement you have allowed that man to love you."

"Angelo," said Mabel, laying her hand on his and drawing it away from his face, "will you do me justice, and listen patiently to all I have to say?"

"Yes," he replied.

"When you were lying very ill some weeks ago, when you had been rash and desperate, and your friends were despairing of your life, they came to me for my assistance," Mabel began. "They said—let us both think now how wrong and foolish it was of them—that a few words of mine, the utterance of a promise which I might consider myself justified in breaking when you were well and strong again, would give you the best chance of health. I hesitated; but your father and mother were in great grief. You lay very helpless and despairing, and the doctors told me I could save you. Was I very wrong to try, even at the cost of my self-respect and truth?"

He pressed her hand warmly in his own.

"I see it all now," he murmured. "And you saved me—but only to cast me back to a greater helplessness."

"I hope not," Mabel said earnestly; "for I am ever one of your truest friends, if you will let me be one. I want to be your confidante, sister—anything that will prove how truly I esteem you."

"What can you do, after owning your want of love for me?" he groaned forth. "I have been looking forward to you as my wife. I have been thanking God for the prospect of a happiness that was ever to be denied me—and you knew this all along!"

"Forgive me—I did it for the best, and not of my own free will," she murmured.

"When was I to be undeceived?" he asked.

"When you were strong and brave again," she replied, "when you could see clearly how unfair it would be to exact from me the fulfilment of a pledge made when you were ill—when little by little I could have asked you to let me go away from you."

"To him!" cried Angelo Salmon, with sudden passion again, "to the man who, loving you

himself, advised you to make me an offer of my hand—to that damned hypocrite !”

“Hush—hush !” cried Mabel, “you do him an injustice—you do not know Brian Halfday to speak of him in that way. He is all that is honest and truthful and kind.”

“I tell you, Mabel Westbrook, you are blinded by your passion for him,” said Angelo; “I am not worthy of you, but I am more deserving of your love than he is. If you have anything more to say to me, say it, please, but without mentioning the name of one who has blighted my whole life.”

Mabel would not accept this interdict upon her lover’s name.

“He has not blighted your life, Angelo,” said Mabel, “for this is a delusion from which you will speedily recover. I had thought to break to you by degrees the impossibility of my being anything more to you than a true friend, and to be thankful that in my humble way I had helped to save you. The revelation has come too soon and too suddenly—I have acted with too great an impulse—but let me believe you are strong enough to think it for the best,

and manly enough to forgive the woman who did not err from want of heart. Let me hear, Angelo, that you bear me no malice, and will try to forget me."

"There is no forgetfulness for me," he answered gloomily, "I have been always weak and foolish—never quite right, as people say—and you have been the one thought of my life. You will remain so to the end, whether I keep sane, or am tied up in a strait-waistcoat," he added, with a short, hard laugh, "and all my actions will be regulated by that thought, for good and for evil. As for forgiveness—see here."

He held both hands towards her, and she placed hers within them confidently.

"There is nothing to forgive; you acted for the best according to your own judgment—it was your own generosity and spirit of self-sacrifice which led you to take pity upon me—and I have only to thank you for much consideration."

"This sounds like satire, Angelo," she murmured.

"I am not clever enough to be satirical," was his reply; "I am speaking what is in my mind,

with no second meaning in the background. If you would rather that I say 'Forgiven'—why, forgiven be it then. Oh! my lost love, whom God has set apart from me!"

The tears were in his eyes once more as he pressed her hands to his heart, but he did not wholly break down again. She rose, and he rose with her and walked on by her side down the valley and along the way which they had come.

"You will return to the hotel?" he said, in a calmer tone.

Mabel answered in the affirmative.

"I am not fit for hotel company at present," he said, abruptly coming to a full stop; "and if you will excuse me I will bid you good-bye here."

"I shall see you this evening?"

"Possibly. I hardly know."

"I am not to lose a friend because I have found courage to tell you the whole truth?" she asked.

"How the whole truth will affect me it is not easy to say," he replied, moodily; "but I will try to keep strong for their sakes."

"Your father and mother's?"

"Yes."

"And for mine. Try and let me think I have told you all and done good, and not harm, by the confession," said Mabel.

"It is easy to try. But it is a hard conviction that it was all done out of pity for me—that I was never loved in the least, and you were only acting a part which was unworthy of you," he replied.

"Angelo, you have not forgiven me."

"Yes—yes—I have!" he exclaimed, "don't mind me—don't regard a word I say just now. Good-bye."

"One moment. Say forgiven too to Brian Halfday," implored Mabel, "think generously of him till he meets you and tells you for himself the——"

He caught her so suddenly by the wrist that she winced with pain.

"It will be well for us both, Mabel, if he and I never meet again," said Angelo fiercely; "I have no forgiveness for him on this earth."

He released his hold of her, and walked back swiftly along the valley, and Mabel watched

him till he was lost to sight. She had called to him once as he broke away from her, but he had marched onwards without heed to her appeal. She had wished to soften his heart towards her lover, and she had had faith in her own powers to effect it, until he had passed away with those strange, darkling looks. It was so unlike poor Angelo to bear malice, or to feel oppressed by a sense of wrong, that she trusted to the natural amiability of his character even yet, although there were doubts besetting her not easily dispelled. Angelo had changed of late days—he had been irritable or dispirited since his recovery from delirium, and only her presence had had power to soothe him. How would he act after the shock, she wondered—would he let her be his friend still, just as if nothing had happened, or they had never talked of being engaged to one another? If he would accept the position calmly all might be well, but the doubts gathered strength in Mabel's mind as she went up the path in the cliff towards the higher ground. She was not happy, although Brian Halfday had told her that he loved her—she was sure she was

growing more unhappy with every hour of her life.

The consciousness of having made two people miserable weighed upon the spirits of a girl naturally sensitive—and that it had all been done for the best was scarcely the satisfaction which she had trusted it might be. She had almost quarrelled with Isabel Disney, who had been kind to her; she had crushed out the hopes of Angelo Salmon, and life would have been dull to her indeed, if thoughts of the future with Brian had not been there to keep her strong. Still she was dull, and when the dinner-hour at the hotel came, and Brian was not present as he had promised, a sense of deeper depression stole upon her, and the first assurance to her own mind that all was not well, and that a great trouble was to date from that day, came as if by inspiration. Looking back at that melancholy feast she believed it was inspiration, and that a voice of warning was whispered in her ears as she took her place with the guests, and marvelled as to the absence of one who should have hastened to her side. She had believed he would,

and that before the night was out the Salmons and Mrs. Disney would have been pleased to congratulate her on her engagement; but now she was sure that something new and strange had arisen to account for Brian Halfday's absence.

It was not a pleasant thought to cross her, but it grew in strength with wonderful rapidity. Something *had* happened to Brian she was certain, although she tried vainly to smile at her own fears, and kept her great grey eyes directed towards the entrance doors, through which he would come presently, if all were well. Painful and ever to be remembered dinner this—the rows of guests laughing and talking on either side of her, and she as conscious of approaching trouble as though the decree had been thundered in her ears—

“He will never return! You will see him no more!”

She allowed the dishes to pass her almost unheeded, feigning at times to eat, in order to escape the ordeal of much questioning from Mr. Gregory Salmon and his wife, who were sitting next to her; but she had turned very

pale, and those on the other side of the table had already whispered amongst themselves that the fair American was looking ill that night. Mrs. Disney had changed her place at the *table-d'hôte*, to mark her sense of displeasure with Mabel; but Mabel had lost all interest in her, and saw, even without surprise or regret, that Michael Sewell was at her side, and more attentive than usual. Gregory Salmon spoke to Mabel, but she did not know what her replies were like, and failed to remember the instant afterwards the topics which he had selected to grow eloquent upon, until he said suddenly—

“You need not be disconsolate, Miss Mabel. He has come back.”

Her heart leaped within her bosom for joy for an instant, and then sank down like a leaden plummet.

“Who has come back?” she asked.

“Angelo. He has been walking fast, or riding hard. He came in very hot and flurried, and told me he should not dine at the *table-d'hôte* to-day—as he had dined, I think he said. I am sorry,” said Mr. Salmon, “because these assem-

blies have amused and distracted him considerably; don't you think so?"

"No—yes—I don't know," said Mabel wearily.

"I hope nothing is the matter—especially between you and Angelo?" asked Gregory Salmon anxiously; "you—you must not think of undeceiving him yet awhile, Miss Westbrook. I—I would rather you married him than that—I would, indeed."

"Please don't talk to me now," Mabel said at last; "I am tired and unwell."

"You are certainly very white," answered Gregory; "but is there not something to tell me about Angelo?"

"Yes—after dinner."

"I am very sorry if—my dear young lady, I am sure you are going to faint. Let me advise you to get out of this hot room."

"Not yet," answered Mabel; "I would much rather remain. I want to wait here. Don't notice me or talk to me, please. I shall be better in a minute."

"I hope Mr. Halfday has not been interfering in this matter," said Gregory Salmon snappish-



ly, and not at all disposed to leave Mabel to herself, now that his curiosity had been aroused.

"Why should you think so?" asked Mabel quickly.

"He is a man who interferes in most things—and, by-the-way, I don't see him at dinner to-night."

"No," said Mabel, with a heavy sigh, "he is not here."

"But there's Angelo—standing at the door; and, great Heaven! how ill he looks too!"

"Oh! good gracious, my poor boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Salmon at the same moment.

Mabel looked towards the door, where Angelo was standing. He was in evening dress; he had changed his morning attire, after his usual custom, and was leaning against the pillar watching her attentively. As their eyes met he started, and moved away into the central hall beyond, but not before the haggardness and horror of his face had struck her as forcibly as his parents. Here was the result of the one mistake, perhaps; for he was changing already. Was it remarkable that she should think of

Brian again, and couple Angelo's looks with him, for a mysterious reason impossible to fathom?

Once more the warning sank to her dull heart, as if the voice had whispered to her again that Brian Halfday was not coming back. She was not naturally superstitious, but it seemed a strange truth to come to her on that night—and like an awful prophecy on the next, and the next, when no sign of his return was made to her from the darkness in which he had disappeared.

CHAPTER XV.

MICHAEL SEWELL ATTEMPTS HIS DEFENCE.

HOW Mabel Westbrook lived through the next two days she never knew completely. That she ate and drank, that she even slept and had strange, awful dreams, wherein the man she loved was for ever in danger, or at the point of death, that she affected a composure which she did not feel, and feigned, for reasons of her own to be presently apparent, to be unexcited by the absence of Brian Halfday, she was aware; but how the long, weary, terrible hours passed was scarcely within the limits of her consciousness. She was like a woman in her sleep, and yet a woman closely on guard and watching jealously for any sign that should

afford a clue to the mystery which had arisen about her lover's life. Brian had disappeared, and there might be many reasons for his absence which a few hours more would satisfactorily explain. Mabel would not think the worst yet. She tried hard, and fought hard to keep a host of terrible doubts and suspicions in the background, and she partially succeeded. It did not seem possible that a man should have met with an accident, or even with foul play, in the broad daylight, and in the neighbourhood of so fashionable a watering-place as Scarborough, without some witness to the act, and it *was* more natural—how sure she was that it was more natural—to set down Brian's absence to a reason of his own, for which he would account when he came back.

Something *had* surely occurred to take him suddenly from Scarborough. Important business of his, perhaps of hers, matters connected with his old trust as curator, or with his new studies—hundreds of reasons, in fact, when she reflected calmly and deliberately upon the matter, might have induced Brian to leave the "Mastodon Hotel" in hot haste. Certainly it



was a trifle unaccountable to go away without an explanation, and to keep away without sending her one line of news, one message by the wires, that might have saved her all these long hours of miserable suspense.

Then came the darker thoughts to distress her.

“He would have never left me like this, he would not have gone without a word, after telling me of his love, and believing in my own. He would have thought of me, first of all.”

Still they were all so calm about her, life went on so very much in the old way, no one seemed to think of Brian but herself, and it was natural to more than one that he should have drifted from the life and laughter of a place that was thoroughly unsuited to him. She knew better than this, but there was little sympathy for her anxiety, and not any for her fears. She had to act for herself, and it had become her duty to watch, and plot, and plan, as though the solution to the riddle lay in the hearts of those who flitted by her in the crowd.

Her first inquiries had been of the clerks in

the office, young men who kept the books, and summed up the expenses of the visitors, in a room on the ground-floor. Mr. Halfday had given no notice of his departure, and had taken his apartments for a week to begin with. The chambermaid on the floor to which his room belonged was signalled to and spoken to by gutta-percha medium, and bellowed down her replies huskily and indifferently. No. 1,008—for Brian had been duly ticketed—had not been to bed, Mabel was informed the next day, and had not been seen in his room since yesterday morning, and his clothes were unpacked, and all over the place. On the following day Mabel found out the chambermaid for herself, and bribed her into civility with five shillings, and into a promise to let her know when No. 1,008 returned to his room.

The maid was of the world worldly, and could not understand Mabel's anxiety following so closely on the gentleman's absence, unless Mabel was his wife, and jealous of him.

"The gents are here, there, and everywhere, when they comes to this place, miss," said the maid. "I wouldn't be fidgety about him for a

week, if I was you. I'll be sure and let you know the moment he comes back."

"Thank you," said Mabel, as she went away from her.

She had obtained her information, she had expected little else, and she felt in her foreboding heart that Brian would never return to that room. She would not own it to herself yet, but time was drifting on, and bringing her no news. When should she act, and how could she act, and in what direction?

Did Angelo Salmon know more than his pale, grave face warranted?—it was he who she thought might know—there had seemed to be an awful knowledge in his looks in the early hours when Brian was first missed, and though he was calm and stoical now, he took great pains to avoid Mabel's company. Did Michael Sewell know? He remained at the hotel like a man who was certain that Brian would not return to make good his accusations against him; he was still Captain Seymour to the outside world, and he avoided Mabel also, or Mabel fancied that he did. Had he guessed that Brian Halfday had told her he was Dorcas's

husband, and had he met Brian and quarrelled with him, perhaps slain him? No, no, that was too horrible; surely the shadow of a crime did not rest upon that handsome, laughing man of one-and-twenty, with whom her friend had been foolish enough to think herself in love?

It was he, however, who spoke to her on the second day, who came to her in the drawing-room, when she was sitting by the window, looking out at sea. The room had been deserted after luncheon, and she had stolen there for peace, or for the deep thoughts which might pass for peace to strangers.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you, Miss Westbrook," he said very politely, "but the fact is, Mrs. Disney wished me to address a few words to you. Have I your permission?"

Mabel moved her head slightly in acquiescence. The man had become a horror to her; but she was curious to learn what was in his thoughts, if possible, and was already prepared to ask him one question in return. He began with his old frankness, or assumption of frankness, at once.

"You don't like me," he said—"you have

allowed yourself to be prejudiced against me.”

Mabel was frank too. She looked up at the man without flinching, till he seemed to grow uncomfortable beneath the steady light of her grey eyes.

“No—I don’t like you, Mr. Sewell,” she replied.

It sounded like defiance—it might be rendering him for ever wary of her, if he were in the secret of Brian Halfday’s disappearance,—but she felt above a falsehood with this trickster.

“My name is not Sewell,” was the bold assertion of the gentleman, “and I am at a loss to imagine why you think it is.”

“I have been told so by one whose word I can implicitly believe.”

“By the gentleman with whom you were walking in the Spa two or three mornings since?” inquired Michael.

It seemed too late to keep this a secret, if it had ever been a secret, and she said,

“Yes—by Mr. Brian Halfday, whose name should be familiar to you.”

“I have not heard it before in my life,” was the unblushing statement here.

"It is false!" cried Mabel passionately—"and you know it is."

"It is a strange delusion for a lady to encourage, and I should be glad to meet this Mr. Halfday face to face, and challenge him to the proof of his extraordinary statement; but," added Michael, with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders, "the man has run away."

"He has disappeared, you mean," said Mabel, closely watching Michael Sewell's countenance.

"I hope you don't think I have murdered him!" said Michael, with a burst of laughter at the supposition. "I may be even bad enough for that in your estimation, I am afraid."

"Where do *you* think he is?" asked Mabel sharply.

"Upon my honour, all I have thought of is the egregious mistake he has committed," said Michael, "and the apology which I consider is due to me in consequence. I should be glad to see him; I should be only too glad to convince him my present identity is not to be disputed, and to receive his assurance that he has been in error. I bear him no malice; he

may have acted in good faith. But why does he keep away?"

"You know better than I do, possibly," said Mabel.

"You do not take my word, then?"

"Against Brian Halfday's? No!" cried Mabel.

"The man may be insane, or short-sighted, or weak of judgment; there is a mystery about him. But you trust him?"

"With my life."

"And doubt me. I am sorry," he said. "It is hardly worth while troubling you with Mrs. Disney's message now."

He waited for Mabel's reply; but Mabel was looking out at sea again, and speculating deeply as to the motives for this man's bravado. He was a clever actor, but he had not deceived her by his impersonation. She was sure Brian had made no mistake, and that it was this man's policy to keep to the character he had assumed.

He delivered his message, although Mabel did not ask for it.

"Mrs. Disney would be glad to see you, and

to be reconciled to you," he said, "if you would have more confidence in her, and suspend your judgment for a few days, until this Mr. Halfmay's, or Halfday's, return. If I can wait here without fear of anything to be said against me, surely you can."

"Will you tell me where Mr. Halfday is?" said Mabel quietly.

"I have not the slightest idea."

"Will you tell me what you have done with Dorcas?"

The question followed so closely upon the other, after Brian Halfday's fashion—which she might have caught from him,—that Michael Sewell for the first time betrayed a momentary confusion at the sudden mention of his wife's Christian name. The colour deepened in his face as he said,

"Who is Dorcas, may I ask?"

"Your wife."

He laughed again.

"I forgot I had one," he said ironically.

"Yes, you *have* forgotten that," was Mabel's caustic answer.

"Miss Westbrook, you will do me justice at

an early date, I hope," he said, bowing low to her before leaving her once more to the study of the sea, "at present you are inflexible."

"Until I find him," answered Mabel, "yes."

She spoke decisively, as though the clue to Brian's discovery was already in her hands ; and as he went out of the door a vigilant observer might have suspected that he paused for an instant on the threshold, as if considering what meaning should be attached to her last words. He looked back at her and bowed once more, but she was not aware of it. Had he been afraid of her he would have taken more consolation to himself, or could he have seen her five minutes afterwards, with her hands crossed on the back of the chair, and her fair young head resting despondently and helplessly upon them. She had lost faith in all humankind save Brian, she thought ; he would not have left her to this torture of uncertainty if there had been any means of communicating with her, and he had had the power to do so. No, something had surely happened to him, although no one would believe in her, and she was wasting time in horrible inaction.

“Oh! my poor Brian,” she murmured, with her gaze directed to the rippling sea, as though it were connected with his fate. “What am I to do? What can I do to help you?”

CHAPTER XVI.

REPROOFS AND SUSPICIONS.

THE troubles were coming to Mabel Westbrook all at once, after the fashion of troubles, which are gregarious. She had lost her lover, and now the few friends she had, or thought she had, were falling away from her, or regarding her with distrust. She had done her best in the world, but her efforts had been miserable failures from the first. A good and warm-hearted young woman this, who had passed through life with hardly a selfish thought, and who had sacrificed time, money, and inclination for the sake of others, and been rewarded with scant praise, and even with ingratitude. She had finally made one little

dash for her own happiness in her old impulsive way, and made a greater failure of it than of the rest of her endeavours, judging by results.

She was no longer friendly with Isabel Disney, as we are aware; there followed a great difference in the manner of Mr. and Mrs. Gregory Salmon towards her, and Angelo avoided her society. She was completely alone in the hotel, and though she was not sorry to be alone, to think and plan and struggle against the mysteries by which she was surrounded, it seemed hard to have lost the respect and sympathy of everyone for whom she had cared a little.

Another day passed without news of Brian Halfday, and then the fourth day of his disappearance followed. Mabel had spent a great many shillings from a purse but scantily filled, and with very vain results. She had telegraphed to Penton Museum, and to the editors of scientific papers for which Brian had supplied occasional articles, asking if the missing man had been seen or heard of; she had held more than one conference with the police authorities



of Scarborough, and she had tried to work out for herself one or two extravagant theories, but the clue was missing, and her woman's heart was failing her.

Those two last days alluded to came in cold and dark and rough, as though they tried hard to make up for lost time, and have their vengeance on the little Autumn that was left them. They were bitter days of sleet and frost and hurricane, and the visitors vanished away with extraordinary celerity, affrighted by the first approach of Winter in real earnest. The guests disappeared as if by magic, and the big hall was crammed with the boxes of the outgoing. It was all over with the season at the "Mastodon;" the manager was aware of it, the waiters knew it by immediate warning; a transformation scene in a pantomime could have scarcely suggested a greater change, only this was from the brightness and lightness of life to the dulness that must last till next Summer.

Mr. and Mrs. Gregory Salmon informed Mabel Westbrook on that fourth morning that their boxes were packed, and they and Angelo were going away that very afternoon. It had been

the first intimation of their departure, and Mabel was surprised and hurt at the announcement, for they had thought a great deal of her of late days, she had been inclined to consider. She did not expect to be asked to accompany them to Saint Lazarus, she would not have gone with them had they made her the offer of their home's shelter for awhile, but the suddenness of the announcement of their departure was depressing. There were three the less in her little world drifting away from her for good ; three who had begun as her friends, and were disposed to consider themselves aggrieved now. Well, well ! they might have their just cause of complaint, for she had acted with precipitation at the last, and out of love for Brian ; she did not know—she had not had the time or patience to consider. There was only one grave thought and misery for her in these latter days, and in her sorrows she was more selfish than she had ever been. She was unsettled and variable and strange herself. Mabel heard the news with composure, despite her surprise at the scant notice of the event.

"I shall miss you all," she said calmly. "I am sorry you are going."

"There is nothing to stop for," said Mrs. Salmon, with a heavy sigh; "the place is doing Angelo more harm than good, and the sooner he is out of it the better."

"Is he anxious to leave this place also?" Mabel inquired.

"He is quite a child in our hands—he never says a word, or seems to care—he—he—oh! Mabel," and then Mrs. Salmon broke down in her old weak way, and buried her face in her handkerchief, and began sobbing violently.

Mr. Gregory Salmon had left the explanation to his wife for a wonder, and this was the result, as he might have guessed, after so many years' knowledge of her character.

"Mrs. Salmon," he said sharply, "you are making yourself exceedingly ridiculous."

"I—I know I am, Greg—Gregory," replied his weeping wife, "but how am I to help it? Oh! my poor boy, that I thought was getting on so well—before this blow came!"

Mabel approached Mrs. Salmon, put one arm

round her neck, and bent her fair young head down till it touched the grey hairs of the elder woman.

"Do you blame me for all that has happened, too? Have I acted so very badly to Angelo?" said Mabel.

"You told him, all at once, you wouldn't have anything more to do with him—and that—that crushed him down completely," said the mother, "and it was—I can't help saying it—very cruel of you."

"He discovered for himself, and before I was prepared to tell him," replied Mabel, "what you and Mr. Salmon have known from the commencement, that I did not consider him as my future husband."

"Miss Westbrook, if you had set your mind to it," said Mr. Salmon, breaking in upon the conference for the first time, "it would have been an easy task to regard my son with affection, and that is what, despite the disparity of the match in a worldly point of view, we had hoped would occur in course of time. It has not been pleasant for me to see my son desirous of an alliance with you—I have done

my best even to reason with him upon the unsuitability of the match; but it was of no use, and Angelo gave way as a silly girl of seventeen might have done with less discredit. It has been a great trouble to me, Miss Westbrook, a blow to my pride in my family and my son, but I was resigned to the match for his sake—I set aside completely my own feelings in the face of the terrible calamity that befell us, and—and this is the end of it.”

“If there has been an error committed, Mr. Salmon,” said Mabel, “it was in that mockery of an engagement into which I was dragged for your son’s sake, and I am sorry. It was at your request, and I knew and saw the danger of it very quickly afterwards. I was foolish, and thought to restore to health by degrees the one man who had been kind to me—although I knew there must follow a day like this to cast him down. I knew I could never love him—and yet I undertook the vain task of saving him by a semblance of affection which no one regrets more than I do.”

“You would have saved him if you had kept on for a month or two longer—if that conceited

man from the Museum had not interfered out of spite and jealousy, and you had not encouraged him to make love to you from the very first moment he came into the hotel," said Mr. Gregory Salmon passionately.

Mabel drew herself up very proudly, and the colour mounted to her face at the taunts hurled at her.

"He did not come too soon," she said, "for he was the only true friend I had. The rest were not worthy of my trust in them."

"A pretty friend to run away in fear of the chastisement he was likely to receive for bearing false witness against his neighbour," said Mr. Gregory Salmon, vindictively; "a nice man to prefer to my boy!"

"He has not run away—and only a coward would imply that he has," cried Mabel, very warmly also; "if he has disappeared for ever, I shall believe that this false Captain Seymour, or your son—God knows which—has killed him. There, that is the thought which is preying upon me, and which I can hold back no longer. There has been foul play, and Heaven give me strength to denounce the

villain. I will have no mercy on his guilt."

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Salmon was prepared for this passionate outcry from one who had been always calm, and equable, and amiable, and both were completely silenced and confounded by her indignation. The terrible suspicion which she had avowed was on her mind came upon them also with an effect that was remarkable, for both turned very white, and stared at Mabel as at a ghost, after nervously glancing at each other. Mabel Westbrook was singularly quick to observe, for she cried eagerly—

"Ha! you know something more of this—Angelo has betrayed himself to you—it is he, then?"

"No, no," cried Mrs. Salmon, "for mercy's sake don't think that! It is not likely he would harm anyone, even in his strange condition—don't think so, Mabel, for a moment."

"I will think so for ever, till he denies it to my face," said Mabel; "I see how jealousy and madness might have brought him to this miserable pass."

"You do me an injustice, Miss Westbrook," said Angelo Salmon, entering the room slowly, and with his eyes studiously averted from her, "after all this while, you should have had a kinder thought of me."

"Well said, Angelo, well said," cried the Master of St. Lazarus, encouragingly. "I am glad you are here to answer for yourself."

"My own dear injured child!" exclaimed Mrs. Salmon, with a fresh burst of tears.

"Miss Westbrook, in her heat of passion," said Gregory to his son, "has made strange charges against you, but when one's lover has absconded under circumstances that——"

Angelo Salmon caught his father by the arm, and checked all further comment by this movement.

"Miss Westbrook is the dearest friend I have in the world, and in insulting her, sir, you make an enemy of me. Perfectly understand that," he said, severely, "an enemy."

Mabel looked hard at the worn face of the man who had defended her, and her heart softened towards him very quickly. He had been eccentric since Brian's disappearance; he

had spoken of his unforgiveness for Brian's stepping between him and his love ; he had avoided her at every turn, as if afraid to meet her, or respond to any question she might put to him ; but she could scarcely believe that Angelo Salmon, even in his madness, would harm any living thing.

"Angelo," she said, "if I have done you an injustice in my troubled thoughts, forgive me. But I know not what to think."

"I forgive you everything," he answered.

"Will you put your hands in mine, and tell me you know not where my Brian is?" she asked, solemnly. "Will you tell me with your old truthfulness that you have not seen him, or heard of him in any way, since I asked your pardon in the valley four days since? Say so frankly to me, and I will not suspect you for a single moment ever again."

He did not answer readily. He did not look into her face, but kept his gaze directed to the carpet of the room in which they were, as if the answers were difficult to make, or the mention of Brian's name had brought upon him his old angry sullenness.

"You have no right to suspect me," he replied at last.

"Then you have not seen him? You do not know where——"

"I will not be suspected!" he cried passionately in his turn. "You will drive me mad in earnest presently. It is well I am going away—a long way from you, Mabel, where I shall never see you again, with Heaven's will."

Mabel had returned to her seat, full of new doubts, for all her protest, and was thinking very deeply, when he said, close to her ear—

"We are going almost directly. You will wish us all good-bye."

"We bear no malice, Miss Westbrook," said his father, whilst the smothered voice of Mrs. Salmon ejaculated,

"And I hope we shall be happy together some day, Mabel—though I don't see how exactly."

Mabel felt helpless as well as friendless now. She would be glad when they had left her to herself.

"You will both shake hands with Mabel," said Angelo almost peremptorily to his parents.

"There must be a complete reconciliation between you before we go."

Mr. Salmon seemed afraid of opposing his will to his son's, and Mrs. Salmon was only too ready to shake hands.

"Good-bye, dear," she whispered, as she stooped down and kissed our heroine. "Don't think unjustly of poor Angelo."

"Good-bye," said Mabel; "and for all past kindness, thank you."

"Good-bye, Miss Westbrook," said Mr. Salmon, taking his wife's place. "If this Christian-like example soothes my son's feelings, I am only too proud to show it in my humble way. And—ahem!—I hope you did not mean what you said about Angelo a little while ago. You were excited—that's all, I trust."

"I was excited," answered Mabel. "Good-bye."

It was Angelo's turn now, and he held his hand towards her, but she shrank from it instinctively. There might be blood upon it for what she knew. It might have struck down a man she loved, only a little while ago—who could tell? He shivered strangely as she re-

coiled from him ; but he stooped down to whisper in her ear—

“It is not good-bye between us, Mabel. I am coming back.”

“When?” she asked quickly.

“Before the night is out I shall see you,” he replied. “Wait for me here ; I shall have much to tell you.”

Then he said in a louder tone of voice “Good-bye,” and went out of the room with his father and mother, and downstairs into the hall, where the porters were struggling with many boxes, and carrying them to the cabs and carriages waiting outside in the breezy street.

“Now for home,” said Angelo, when they were being driven to the station at a rapid pace. “We shall not have much time to catch our train, I am afraid.”

CHAPTER XVII.

ANGELO'S ROOM.

MABEL WESTBROOK waited impatiently for the return of Angelo Salmon, but the weary hours went by without a sign of him. She was alone in the world now, and knew not which way to turn. If he came not back—if it had all been a subterfuge to throw her off her guard, what should she do? His manner had implied that he was at the bottom of the mystery which had shut Brian Halfday from her, but was she positive of this, or had he a second and different meaning at which there was no guessing? Every thought and every incident she connected with Brian's absence—was it possible that Angelo would confess the truth

to her if he had been the cause of it? Was it probable even that this incomprehensible being would return to own his baseness to the woman he had loved? Would he teach her by his own confession to hate him for his treachery?

Mabel wandered like a restless spirit, knowing no rest, about the rooms and corridors of the hotel. There was a depression about the place that suited with her mood, and when the night had set in the wind howled dismally from the sea, and came in angry gusts against the windows of the edifice.

It had been almost a complete migration from the "Mastodon"—the break out of the plague could have scarcely effected a more general clearance of the visitors, than this sudden outburst of rough weather upon the Yorkshire coast. Fashion packed up its best clothes, spread its wings, and flew away, and its imitators followed in hot haste. The "Mastodon" was nearly empty, the dinner was served in a small room to the few visitors remaining—only a few burners here and there in the great candelabras in the drawing-room and hall were lighted, and the waiters crept about

like funeral mutes who had set their staves aside and were looking for the body in the corridors.

Mabel did not dine that night ; she was sick at heart, and anxious. She seemed waiting for the terrible truth that was to strike her down completely.

Still it was difficult to wait, and impossible to rest. She took up her position in the gallery where she had sat with Brian late on the first night of his arrival—the place was in shadow, but she could look down into the hall and see who came and went through the great entrance doors, and she was away from the little coterie remaining, and from the tattle of which she was glad to be free. Presently there descended the half-lighted stairs Michael Sewell and Isabel Disney—the former in a thick great-coat, the skirts of which touched his heels, the latter in the semi-evening dress she had adopted for that night's dinner wear.

Michael Sewell was in no loving mood. He descended the broad staircase with a heavy, slouching tread, and with his hands thrust to the bottom of his pockets. Isabel seemed

distressed about him by her anxious look into his face, which he turned half from her.

"You will be back to-morrow, then?" said Isabel.

"Yes, to-morrow."

"Late to-morrow, of course," said Isabel with a sigh, "what shall I do in this dreary place till you return?"

"I don't know," was Michael's candid confession here. "If this important business could only be postponed till——"

And then the voices died away in the basement, and Mabel sat there a witness to the farewell, and wondered if Michael Sewell were going away for good, and what was the urgent motive for his departure? Mistrusting him in everything, she could believe that he was passing away from Isabel Disney's life—and that the flirtation was closing for ever, with the shutting of the glass doors upon him in the street. It was well for the "big blonde," but was it as well for her? Whilst she sat there supinely, he might be passing away with the secret which it had become her one mission in life to discover, and beset by this new fear she

half rose with the hasty intention of following him. She sat down again, and wrung her hands at her own helplessness—she was not dressed for travelling, and she was waiting for the second man whom she distrusted still, and who had promised to come back and tell her everything.

Would he come back? If he had left his parents at the railway station, why had he not returned long since? Had he passed away from her power of tracking him, as Michael Sewell had; and was this the miserable end of all her thought for Brian?

She looked across at the corridor where Angelo had looked across at her on the night she had sat with Brian—when Brian had been irritable and jealous; and she had felt very happy, despite all that jealousy and harshness which had been the sure signs of his deep love for her. Angelo's room immediately faced her on the other side of the corridor—the sitting-room to which he had been accustomed to repair when the busy world was too much for him—and she could see that the door was ajar, and a lamp burning there.

A lamp burning in the room of No. 28 ! Then he was expected back, and all had been prepared for him by those in charge of the first floor. Perhaps he had returned already, and might be waiting for her, and all this while she had been wasting time here. The big clock over the dining-room registered eight hours of the night—where could Angelo be, if not in his own apartment ? Mabel rose, and went quickly and softly round the circle of the gallery towards the room, and, without hesitation, pushed open the door and entered.

It was empty, and its owner had not yet returned. There was a fire burning in the grate, a dressing-gown hanging across the back of the easy chair, wherein Angelo had dreamed many an hour away ; and a book—the poems of Shelley—lying open on the table.

“Not here,” whispered Mabel to herself, “but coming back to keep his word with me.”

She walked to the mantelpiece, looked along it like the curious woman that she was now, and then started back a few paces, as though stung by a serpent. A moment's pause ; then she approached again, with her hands shaking,

her lips quivering, her bosom heaving painfully, and took from the mantelpiece a pair of very fragile steel-framed spectacles.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CONFESSION.

MABEL WESTBROOK stood by the fireside perfectly motionless—a figure struck into stone by the horror of the discovery. Cold and white as marble, and with her great grey eyes fixed and glazed, it was difficult to associate this fair rigidity with the excitable woman of a few moments since. It was as though the consciousness of an awful truth had set an icy hand upon her heart and stopped it.

But the brain was very busy, and the thoughts were crowding on it thick and fast. Brian was dead, she was sure, and Angelo Salmon had killed him in his jealousy. The secret of the four days' silence was explained ;

it was the awful, inexorable silence of the grave, and her love for the one unselfish man whom she had ever met had brought about his death. Whatever she did was for the worst, and misery as surely followed every act of hers as the night followed the day. It was her own rashness which had been the cause too—her own impulsive leap towards the one happiness of her life, her own wild wish to let Brian know at once that he had not loved her and struggled for her in vain. And he was surely dead! Angelo had had no mercy; he had almost vowed revenge when she had parted with him in the valley, and he had followed Brian and struck him down. What a miserable end to three lives that might, with self-respect and self-restraint, have closed in fair contentment! What a darkness before everything from this day! and what a misery beyond all imagination and endurance! She should go mad presently—there was no help for it. She did not know how deeply and truly her heart was bound up with Brian's, until the awful consciousness was upon her that he belonged no more to this life. She would be glad to follow him—she would

be very glad to die—life and life's duties seemed completely ended now that peace and happiness lay for ever beyond her reach.

If she could give way like a child—if she could only sob and grieve and rave—it would be better for her in those terrible moments that had closed her in with triple bars of steel, but the tears would not come, and the power of moving, talking, weeping, was lost. She was spell-bound, as in a dream, only it was the grim reality which had coiled round her with its serpent folds, and held her there a prisoner.

If she could from the turmoil of confusion at her brain evolve some plan of action at once, and as a strong man might do—if she could look upon one dear, still face—if she could pray to heaven for help and guidance in her affliction, and not stand motionless with dry, dead lips!

The door opened, was closed again, and Angelo Salmon stood a few paces from her, glaring at her as at an apparition that had come to him in his turn. He was pale and haggard also—the spectre of the man whom we first knew calm and sanguine at the Hospital of St.

Lazarus, and whom a child might have governed then.

"I did not expect to find you waiting for me," said Angelo. Then he caught sight of the steel-framed spectacles in her hands, and shuddered visibly.

"You have found them—you have guessed what has occurred," he groaned forth, as he dropped into a chair and turned his head away from her.

Mabel struggled hard to find her voice, and it came back with the mighty effort which she made.

"Yes—you have killed him!" she gasped forth, as she sank into the arm-chair by the fireside, a weak and prostrate woman. A sense of faintness stole over her, as in the hour when Adam Halfday died for joy, but it did not render her wholly insensible. There was the rushing as of a sea in her ears, and a thick mist rose before her that hid everything. She could hear Angelo's voice, she could feel hot tears and clinging kisses on her hands, but it was not till the mist cleared somewhat that she was conscious of Angelo kneeling at her feet,

crouching before her, holding her hands in his nervous clasp, and kissing and crying over them.

"Oh! Mabel, forgive me—for heaven's sake, forgive me!" were the first words she heard him utter. "I was mad, and knew not what I did. I felt he had blighted my whole life—I *was* mad. Do pity me a little!"

"Let go my hands!" Mabel shrieked forth; "you shall not touch me—stand back!"

Angelo obeyed her. He returned to the seat from which he had dashed in distress at her half-swoon, and sat there with his shaking hands clasped together, and his face convulsed with grief.

"You have killed him!" Mabel moaned—"you have murdered the man I loved, and for whom I would have gladly died! God forgive you, poor wretch, for I never, never can!"

"Mabel—he is not dead—*yet!*"

Mabel had sprung up with a half-stifled cry of joy, but she sank back again at the terrible last word. He saw the effect which he had produced, and was once more bending over her and speaking very hurriedly.

"He may not die—there are those who think he will get over it,—but Heaven will not be as merciful as that to him and me. I can only say, I pray he may recover," he cried. "Oh! Mabel, Mabel, think charitably of me, if you can; it was the madness in me did it. Don't judge me—I knew not what I was doing after I had lost you."

"He is not dead yet, you say?" said Mabel, starting to her feet, her mind fraught with a new purpose.

"Not yet," replied Angelo.

"Take me to him. It is the only reparation you can make me," she cried.

"It is with that object I am here."

"Why do we waste time, then?" she exclaimed impatiently.

"When you are ready for the journey, you will find me waiting in the hall," said Angelo, "as I used to wait for you night after night before he came," he added.

"Is it possible there is malice in your heart still?" asked Mabel wonderingly.

"No. I am only thinking of my loss," he answered mournfully.

"At this time!" cried Mabel with indignation—"you!"

Angelo did not answer her; he went moodily from his room to the great hall, where he sat down until she came to him, wrapped in a thick black shawl from which her white face gleamed with keen anxiety.

"This may distress and unnerve you," he murmured, "and you have never been strong."

"I am very firm," was her reply.

They went from the hotel together, and the high wind met them outside in anger and shrieked at them. It was a black night, without moon or stars in the dark sky; the gas-lights were struggling hard to exist in the breeze, the shops were closed, and the streets seemed devoid of human life already.

"Which way?" asked Mabel.

"This way—towards the lower part of the town."

"He is there, then?"

"He is lying on board ship in the harbour," answered Angelo.

"And you have allowed the woman you professed to care for to be absent from him all

these dreadful days!" she said—"you could have taken me to him, and yet you witnessed my suspense with a silence as cruel as yourself!"

"I will explain as we proceed," he said; "at present you misjudge me."

Mabel glanced at him. He had altered once more; there was a certain dignity, even a firmness, in his tone, that had not been natural to his character; he looked a stronger man now—like one who had made up his mind as to his future course of action.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HARBOUR.

AS they proceeded towards the lower part of the town, signs of human life were visible in the closer streets; the fishermen's voices became noisy in bar-parlours, and harsh Yorkshire "gutturals" issued from shadowy turnings and deep doorways, where humanity might be cowering from the wind that came across the sea.

"Tell me how it all happened," said Mabel; "let me know the worst before I see him."

"Very well," he answered, slowly; "you wish it, and I have to answer you. But," he added, in a strange, imploring tone, "think the

best of me that you can, for I *was* mad, and did not think for myself."

"Are you sorry for the harm you have done?" she asked—"would you recall him to health and strength if it were possible?"

"Yes," he replied—"Heaven knows I would!"

"Go on; I will think the best of you that I can, then," she said.

He murmured his thanks, and, as they descended the steep decline towards the town and the harbour—dark and dangerous at that hour,—he told the story of his jealousy.

"I had been watching you all the morning," he commenced, "I had had strange dreams, in which this Brian Halfday troubled me, and I was warned of him in the waking hours which followed. I knew he was here to take you from me—it came to me suddenly, the awful consciousness that you loved this man, and had loved him months ago. Well, I watched you—I was your spy—you know!"

"Yes," said Mabel; "all this you told me in the valley, where I had hoped better thoughts had followed your suspicions."

"For you—not for him," he replied. "When

I left you, I saw him by chance on the stretch of sand beyond the Spa. He was walking fast towards the town, and I strove to intercept him. With what object I hardly knew—save to upbraid him for what I thought his treachery. He saw me—he was wearing the glasses which you had in your hand a little while ago—and he waited for me to come up with him.”

“Yes—yes—go on,” said Mabel, impatiently.

“If I had not met him then—if we had approached each other in a different manner—what an escape from the tragedy that is upon us,” he said, “and for which I am waiting.”

“Waiting?”

“When he dies, I surrender as his murderer.”

Mabel shuddered.

“There may be hope,” she said; “do not tell me life is to close with all these horrors round us. Do not speak of what is to follow his death,” she added piteously—“spare me.”

Angelo continued his narrative:

“He would not listen to me when we were facing each other on the sands; the place was unsuitable, he said, and people were passing—who would be attracted by my angry words.

Perhaps he was right not to explain—I don't know now," he added helplessly, "I cannot see what might have been."

He hesitated for an instant, and then went on again, after taking a long, deep breath, as if the ordeal of recital were trying to him, or he was fearful of the effect upon his listener.

"There were boats on the sands, and he suggested we should row out to sea, and talk there without listeners," he continued.

"Was he not afraid, knowing——"

"Knowing I was dangerous," added Angelo; "no, it was his own suggestion. He was very calm, he was anxious to be kind, he was more than anxious to prove that his love for you was deeper and stronger than my own, and he was full of pity for me. As if I cared for the commiseration of the man who had supplanted me," cried Angelo, in a loud, fierce tone, as the scene rose up before him again, "as if it did not put murder in my thoughts to have *his* pity!"

"You are not sorry for your crime—you hate him still," said Mabel, "you look back at this with all your old vindictiveness."

"No, no, it is past," Angelo hastened to say;

"I would change places with him now, for your sake, if it were possible. Don't misjudge me."

"You rowed out to sea together," repeated Mabel. "Well?"

"Where he stung me to madness again with his pity," said Angelo, speaking very rapidly; "where he told me of his love for you, and thought but little of my own affection. He strove to reason me out of my passion, by telling me that time would soften my disappointment, and you and he would be my friends and counsellors; he spoke as to a child who had been balked of a holiday, rather than to a man whose one hope of happiness he had plucked up by the roots. I told him this—I cursed him for a traitor—and he answered me at last with that biting tongue of his which stabs like a knife. We quarrelled—and we were a long way out together on the open sea, with only God to watch us!"

"What did you do?" asked Mabel, breathlessly.

"I went mad," he muttered.

"Go on, please, let me know the very worst," Mabel adjured.

"I told him he should not live to be happy with you," Angelo continued, "and that his life should end, as mine had, in a blank; that I hated him, and meant to kill him, if I could. I sprang at him, and he fought for life with me, and presently, I know not how, he went down like a dead man to the bottom of the boat."

"Great Heaven!" Mabel exclaimed. "And then?"

"And then I knew not what to do; the oars were missing, and I drifted with the tide and his still body, knowing I was a murderer, and had crushed you as well as him."

"Well?"

"I remember little else, until the boat was alongside a collier which was bound for Scarborough. It was almost night upon the sea, and we had been drifting from the coast. We were taken on board, where Brian came round a little, and offered his own explanation to screen me, and I stood like a coward and took no blame upon myself. It had all been an accident, he said—a chance blow, and

in the hurry and anxiety of finding ourselves out of our reckoning, we had grown careless and clumsy. It was a poor excuse, and no one believed us. Brian looked forward to returning with me to the hotel. When we reached Scarborough, however, he was lying in one of the seamen's berths, very sick and faint—a sailor had bandaged his head, but he had become too weak to move. He was conscious of his position, and very anxious to screen the villain that I had been to him. He wished to lie there for an hour or two, he said. He would recompense the captain and sailors for their trouble very handsomely if they would allow him to remain on board ship for a short time longer; and to any inquiries that might be put, if they would intimate he was one of the crew who had got a little hurt during the journey. I left him in haste, I was to return in two hours if he did not come back to the hotel—he would have no doctor sent for—he only wanted rest, he was certain.”

“Oh! Why did you not tell me on that night?” cried Mabel. “Could you not see my trouble? Did he not think of me?”

"Yes, but he was afraid of alarming you," replied Angelo, "and he had a hope of being back at the 'Mastodon' that evening, to tell his story in his own way. It was only a question of a few hours, he thought, and I tried hard to think so too. But he did not come back as he had promised."

"What did you do?" asked Mabel; "go on, we are approaching the very worst now."

"Yes," he answered, "the very worst."

"You will keep nothing from me. You will not leave Brian to prove to me how false you are?" she said, fretfully and suspiciously.

"I have acted for the best since the quarrel," replied Angelo; "do not think me a villain in cold blood, for mercy's sake!"

"Well, well," said Mabel, with impatience, "you returned to the ship?"

"Yes, taking with me a friend."

"A friend!" repeated Mabel, and there stole over her a sense of deeper horror, though only a moment since it had seemed impossible that that could be.

"A friend whom I could trust, and to whom I turned in the trouble which had befallen me,"

Angelo continued, "and we went together to the harbour, where the ship was lying."

"And Brian?"

"He was worse. He was delirious and knew us not—and he has been getting weaker since! He has remained unconscious of us all until to-day. Then," added Angelo, "he asked for you, and I promised he should see you."

"And all this time he has remained a prisoner in your hands, and you could not trust one who had the greatest right to know the truth. After all," she added scornfully, "you were thinking of your own safety, not of my unhappiness."

"No, no, I was waiting to tell you all—I had no thought for myself," he answered.

"And this man—your friend whom you could trust—has he had the care of Brian too?"

"Without him I should have been in the hands of justice," said Angelo; "he has done his best to avert the scandal, just as Brian would have wished. He has believed in Brian's getting better—he has been sure of it—and he has had the authority of the doctor for this opinion till to-day. The crew of the collier have sympathized with us, and kept silence."

"Bribed by your money," added his companion.

"At all events, Mabel, I have been only silent to spare you. If Brian had recovered, it would have been better to hear the truth from his lips—but sinking slowly from this life, you hear the truth from mine, as the law—I swear it—will hear it very soon."

He raised his hands above his head, as if in confirmation of his vow, but Mabel did not reply to him again. They were proceeding along the harbour side, with the dark water on either side of them, and the masts of ships and coasting vessels rising above them, dimly defined against the inky blackness of the sky.

"Does he know I am coming?" Mabel asked, after they had proceeded some distance in silence.

"Yes."

"You promised you would bring me?"

"Yes," he answered for the second time, "and you will be prepared for a great change in him, and—be merciful."

"Is the doctor with him?"

"The doctor, or my friend?"

"Your friend—with him now—do you tell me?" cried Mabel, with astonishment.

"He has hardly left him—you do not know what interest he has shown in Brian's position and my own—and how he has struggled to do the best for all of us. You cannot imagine——"

Mabel caught him by the arm and swung him round with a strength for which he was unprepared, and she unconscious.

"Don't tell me his name is Michael Sewell," she cried.

"Certainly it is not, he——"

"Or Captain Seymour. For Heaven's sake, not Captain Seymour, Angelo!" she went on hurriedly.

Angelo was surprised, even dismayed.

"Yes—it is Captain Seymour. I had no other friend here. What of him? What can you possibly know against him?" he exclaimed.

"I know Brian's life is not safe with such a villain—and if you have trusted him you have added to your crimes," cried Mabel; "for it is too late, too late now! You have been duped, betrayed!"

"No, no; you are in error," said Angelo.
"All this is a delusion on your part."

"Do you know he hates Brian Halfday?"

"I cannot think so for an instant."

"That he is the husband of Brian's sister?"

"Impossible! There must be some great mistake."

"Ay, there is. And never again will the chance come of righting it," replied Mabel in despair; "for this man is more desperate and revengeful than I fancied. He has laid his plans too cunningly for us to thwart him. We shall find poor Brian dead, or the ship missing from the harbour. Here is the cruel end of it!"

"Let me beg you to calm yourself—to suspend your judgment for a few more minutes," he entreated; "and to forgive a wretch like me offering you advice. A few more minutes, please. Here is the place, and here——"

He stopped, looked down into the black void of water, and then quickly out to the dark harbour's mouth, where the sea was raging. Beyond, in the darkness, there was a red light swinging wildly to and fro, as from the mast of

a vessel struggling with the might of wind and wave. Angelo gave a cry like a maniac, and ran towards the end of the pier. Mabel remained motionless, struck again with that deadly stupor which had overcome her once before that night. Here was the cruel end, indeed, and as she had prophesied !

Angelo discovered two or three men, heavily equipped against the storm, standing at the end of the pier, watching the light in the distance.

"Has anything left the harbour?" he inquired.

"Ay, they have gone, the madmen," answered one; "and if they are not at the bottom before morning, it's good luck, not gumption."

"Was it the *Mary Grey*, Sunderland?" he asked.

"Ay, it was. If ye wanted to go aboard her, it's lucky eno' ye've missed her," said another with a laugh.

"It's the Jock who has been about here so often, Bill," whispered a third. "There's something queer been going on with that craft, and we shall hear more on it."

"Brandy," said the first speaker, "or 'bacca!
But bust me if they landed any of it here."

"Treachery!" muttered Angelo to himself.
"My poor injured Mabel was right."

CHAPTER XX.

A SURPRISE.

IT may be recorded for the better comprehension of the incidents that follow, that Michael Sewell was no arch-plotter, no mechanical soulless villain of modern melodrama. In his way, he had meant well once or twice in life, but ill-luck had been invariably against him. He had had no desire to make enemies; he was always proud of securing a friend, and what he did, whether for good or evil, he did with all the energy of his nature, which was strong and strange, and difficult of analysis. He was intolerably selfish and insufferably vain, it was evident to most people with whom Michael Sewell became acquainted; but there

were moments of good feeling—even of thorough earnestness, which deceived many folk, and certainly himself amongst the number, as to his natural character. He was passionate and headstrong very often; but he was cool and calculating when the occasion seemed to warrant the full use of his reasoning powers. He would at all times have made a friend rather than an enemy; and he hated Brian because he had failed to impress him, or secure a scrap of his esteem, rather than on account of the harm Brian had done him on one particular occasion, when it would have been convenient to hide in Penton Museum for a day or two. And he had loved Dorcas Halfday in his narrow and shallow fashion. He was flattered by her faith in the deserter, and he had rewarded her constancy by making her his wife, swearing to be true and faithful to the end of time, as he thought he should be in those early days of his affection. If there had been no temptation in the world, he would have jogged along in life very smoothly; but life had been all temptation to him, and he had succumbed to it placidly. He was not twenty-two years of age yet, and there

would be plenty of time to sow his wild oats and sober down into a respectable member of society. At present, he considered that he had not had his "fling," and life was not worth a button without "flings." He meant no one any harm; he was full of noble aspirations; he had promised Dorcas that Mabel's money should be faithfully restored to her; he had been seized with pity for a day and a half for William Half-day's helpless condition, even, and had taken him to a home, where for ever afterwards the man had been an incubus; but the evil weeds grew thickly and rapidly in Michael Sewell's heart, and choked every feeble little shoot of goodness which it had once put forth. He was not going rapidly to the bad, but pitching himself headlong down at it, from the precipice on which he had stood.

Mabel Westbrook judged rightly that this man was to be feared, although he had begun his plotting with the best intentions, and with only a wish to screen Angelo from the consequences of his rash act. He had been prepared to take the case in hand unselfishly; he was not very sorry his brother-in-law had been ham-

mered about the head with a boat's oar ; he had an idea that it served him right, and kept him quiet at a time when he might have made himself extremely obnoxious at the "Mastodon," and especially with that charming Mrs. Disney. He believed Brian would recover ; and he took into his confidence a doctor who was staying at the hotel, and who, seeing also no danger in Brian's condition, undertook the case for friendship's sake. He had spent his own money freely, as well as Angelo's, in keeping things quiet ; and it was only the discovery of a paper in Brian's possession that turned him from a watch-dog to a wolf. This was the copy of a will made by Adam Halfday, of St. Lazarus, and bearing a later date than that by which Dorcas had come into possession of twenty thousand and odd pounds. The copy only—what Brian had done with the original document it was impossible to conjecture. Michael Sewell must discover in some way or other where that will was—he could not face beggary so quietly as this—at any cost he must fight for his position, which would be struck from under

him at a blow if this will were proved, or Brian Halfday lived.

If Brian Halfday died, all was well again; and if, in his weakness, he would give up the will, everything might be amicably arranged, he thought; and Brian *was* very weak now!

What was really festering at the bottom of his heart Sewell hardly knew, or he would not dare to confess; but the night was thick about his thoughts, and he felt more desperate than he had ever done. Ruin was so close upon him that it unnerved him at one moment, and hardened him the next; and it was with a sudden dash at an idea that he had lavished money upon the collier's crew to tempt them to get out of the harbour in the face of the oncoming storm. Brian was worse, and Mabel Westbrook was expected. They must all get away, or be implicated in the affair, Michael told the crew. If he were not afraid of the gale, surely they had no occasion to be so; let them be gone from the clutch of the police, and talk the matter over again when they were out at sea.

Hence the vessel had, in the face of danger,

put out from the little harbour, and weather-wise folk had shaken their heads, and thought it would have been wiser to keep at anchor till the wind had calmed; but Michael Sewell was of a different opinion. This man had some of the right material of a soldier in him—he loved danger, at least. There was an excitement in this last adventure which had its charm for him, and the waves leaping up the sides of the ship, and breaking over him and the crew, did not damp his spirits. Here were life and action, and he enjoyed them to the uttermost. Presently he should be able to arrange his plans concerning the dying man in the berth below; there was time before him, and they were making for a foreign port. It was more than probable that Brian would come to a natural death ere they were at anchor again; but an hour or two afterwards it occurred to Michael Sewell, suddenly and unpleasantly, that he might be taken off to a better world before his brother-in-law. This he had not prepared for. He had had faith in the ship and the crew, and it remained unshaken in the face of the gale; but it had not entered into his

calculations that the pangs and agonies of sea-sickness would make a premature end of him. He had not thought of sea-sickness for an instant, until it came upon him with a force that completely unnerved him, and reduced him to a log-like condition upon the grimy deck, where he clung to some ropes that were handy there.

It was an ignoble position for the "villain of the story," and we would have passed it over in respectful silence had it not been for the incidents which hinge upon his bodily prostration.

Michael Sewell was terribly bad, and swore terribly, also, whilst he was bad; and astonished and shocked the sailors, who were great in swearing too. He would take no advice, he would not be interfered with, he would not go downstairs and rest; he would stop up there and die, and be damned, he said. Would he take any brandy? Yes, he would take as much as he could get of that. And then he called down all the bitter curses in his vocabulary—and it was rich in curses—on the heads of the infernal, heartless hounds who had poured

that abominable and beastly varnish down his throat, and added still more to the torments by which he was afflicted. If the ship would only go to the bottom at once, he should be glad. They were talking of putting back rather than face the storm, of altering their course and running for Bridlington—of doing anything rather than brave the storm; but he had not the strength to interfere. Let them do exactly as they pleased, so that he died quickly, and without their troubling him. He was sure he was going to die, and the sooner it was over the better for all parties concerned. He had only one charitable wish to add to this—he hoped everybody on board would die too, and so make a neat and tidy job of it.

He was not too ill to be astonished; indeed, the sudden consternation into which he was thrown took away his sickness for a while. Was he in another world already, that a woman should steal to him, kneel down before him, and put her arms round his neck?—a woman as drenched with sea-spray as he was, and with black, tangled wet hair streaming from beneath the hood with which her head

was covered. Was it all a dream?—or was this really the wife he had left behind in London, to take care of house and home, and a horrible father-in-law, until it pleased him to return?

“Michael,” said a faint voice in his ear—
“my poor Michael!”

Michael opened his eyes and said, “The devil!” at first; and then, “Dorcas!”

“Yes—it is I. How ill you are! Why did you venture in this dreadful ship on such a night as this?” she asked. “What does it all mean?”

“What does it all mean? By God, that’s just it!” he exclaimed, sitting up in his surprise. “What *does* it mean? How on earth did you get here?”

“You are very ill,” she said, solicitously, and without replying to his question—possibly studiously evading it; “rest your head upon my bosom, Michael—put your arms round me, or we shall both be washed overboard into this awful sea.”

“As soon as it likes—I don’t care,” he murmured; then he sank back, and Dorcas wept

over him, until he sat up again, and scowled at her, and told her not to make that row.

"How did you get here?" he added—"why don't you tell me, you fool!"

"I have been very jealous of you, Michael," she confessed, burying her head on his heaving chest—and it was heaving very uncomfortably still—"and you must forgive and scold me presently, not now. I have been driven mad by my suspicions of you—oh! my handsome husband, I have had such unworthy thoughts of you!"

"Ah! that is like you women," growled the husband, who would have been handsomer at that juncture had he been less of a bright yellow; but darkness hid the deterioration of his looks from mortal eye.

"I have been following you like a spy for days and days," Dorcas continued; "I have watched your flirtations with that dreadful woman with the dyed hair—I have been truly and completely miserable."

"Serve you right," he answered; "what did you come—to this cursed place for? Oh! my head—I'm going now!"

"No, no, rest awhile. Don't talk."

"But I will talk!" he cried. "What right have you to tell me not to talk? And in the name of everything that's infernal, what brought you on board this ship?"

"I have seen you about here so often," she answered, "I thought you and she were arranging to elope together, Michael, and leave me in my desolation; and when you went down stealthily to the harbour this evening, I watched my opportunity and followed you, and hid away till now. And she is not with you, thank Heaven! She never meant to come—tell me that, Michael—please do!"

"Meant to come? I never asked her—never thought of her."

"I am so glad," said Dorcas, bursting into tears.

"Have you been sick?" asked her husband.

"No."

"I wish you had," was his unfeeling remark here; "I wish you felt as I did, for dodging after me like this. I wish——"

Then he lay full length again, and declined further conversation until he felt better.

"I should have killed her if she had stepped on board with you," hissed Dorcas in his ear. "As true as I am a living woman, Michael, I was prepared to kill her, thrust her into the sea, stab her, if she had crossed my path to-night. But she has not come, and you are here for another purpose altogether."

"Just for a cruise," he muttered.

"In this ship?"

"Yes—but don't lean on me! What are you driving your elbows into my stomach for? Ain't I ill enough already?" he inquired morosely.

"I am very sorry you are ill. Oh! if we could only get to shore, Michael!"

Michael did not answer then. When he had recovered somewhat, he sat up with a feeling of less nausea and despair, and looked at his wife gloomily.

"I wish you had been drowned before coming here!" he said savagely—"upon my soul I do!"

"Why?"

"I don't want you. What will the crew think of us? What's to become of my character?"

"It can all be explained. And Michael," she said, "think how happy I am to be with you again, even in this awful storm. If she had come—if I had failed to kill her——"

"Bosh!" said Michael.

"If I had failed," she went on, without heeding his comment, "see here."

She drew a small phial from her pocket, and he stared at it with awakening interest.

"What is that?"

"Poison," she replied.

"You would have taken poison?" he said.

"Yes; I should have been glad to get out of a world where I had lost all that was worth living for," she murmured.

Michael Sewell snatched the phial from the hands of his wife, and placed it carefully in his pocket.

"That stuff is safer with me," he said.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PATIENT.

THE little *Mary Grey* of Sunderland weather-
ed the storm bravely off the Yorkshire coast, and did more justice to her builders than many craft of greater pretensions, which went ashore or went down on that unlucky night. The crew of the *Mary Grey* had faith in their ship, and it did not betray them; they would have preferred the shelter of the harbour till the wind changed and the sea was calm, but having once been persuaded and bribed into departure, they had no fear of anything save the discomfort of the voyage.

What was to become of their passenger, one

Brian Halfday, of whom they had taken charge four days ago, they did not exactly see, and were slightly anxious concerning. They were in a "mess" as regarded that little matter; they had consented to secrecy to oblige a couple of gentlemen who had been liberal with their five-pound notes, but the affair had assumed ugly proportions of late, and might end in an assize case at York if they were not extremely careful. They did not want any "bother," and they intended to keep a sharp look-out in their own interests as well as in their newly-discovered patrons. There was more mystery, too, than they had looked for, and the sudden appearance of a woman on the scene added to the complications of these worthy but thick-headed seamen. They had kept their word, and sailed out of the harbour, but as for making for Rotterdam or Havre for the sake of one or two hundred pounds, it was hardly in their calculations. They would be glad to give Flamborough Head a wide berth and run into Bridlington, and get rid of the sick man as speedily as possible, telling the whole truth if necessary. If not absolutely necessary, they would prefer

a lie ; but they were not going to risk anything more, if they could help it.

Probably all might end well, though the chances within the last few hours had been unpleasantly against the supposition. The storm that had tossed the vessel like a cork upon the waves had rocked into sleep the man lying in the berth below deck, had brushed up his faculties on waking, and given him a greater interest in passing things. He was very weak still, but the consciousness that had returned to him was gathering strength rapidly, and the dark eyes watched every movement of those who flitted by him in the semi-darkness. He was not so weak as in the morning, and a sailor lad who had been his constant nurse told him so with exultation. This was in the night time, when Michael Sewell was unwell above deck, and his wife was attempting consolation with indifferent success.

"Ye're better," said the lad with a grin, as he hung on to anything which was handy, to keep his footing, whilst he stared at Brian, "and I'm moighty glad."

Brian moved his head slowly in assent.

"I suppose I'm better," he said, in a husky whisper. "What has it been all about? Let me see——"

"Ye were picked oop——"

"Ay, yes—I remember," he said, interrupting the first speaker after his old fashion; "don't talk—let me think."

Brian considered the position before he said,

"When I was awake last, boy, Mr. Salmon—that is the man who comes here very often—promised to bring a lady to see me."

"Ay, ay," ejaculated the lad.

"How long was that ago?"

"Oh, hours ago."

"Has she been?"

"She's upstairs—on the deck; I've seed her misen."

"I am very glad of that," said Brian to himself, and his haggard face brightened at the news.

After considering the position again, Brian beckoned to the boy, who had his foot upon the ladder, with the intention of joining the crew on deck, to come to his side again.

Brian's voice was not strong yet, and the wind howled and the timbers creaked noisily.

"Tell the lady I am awake," he said, "and very anxious to see her."

"Roight, sir. And the gentleman?"

"Never mind about him at present."

"All roight," said the boy.

"And—here, wait a minute," added Brian, with more crispness of accent than had been observed in him by his new friends up to the present time. "Can't this place be set to rights a little?"

The boy burst into a loud laugh.

"Noa—not very loikely, in the starm," he replied.

"What storm?" asked Brian. "Is there a storm?"

"Oi—ay," he said again; "and ye've got a foot o' water here already."

"Then it's not my weak head that makes this berth, and that lantern, roll and pitch about so. Where are we?"

"It's na easy tellin'."

"In—let me see—the harbour—at Scarborough."

The boy roared with laughter again. The guesses of the invalid were exceedingly amusing.

"Ye're at sea," he said. "We shall roon for Bridlington, if we can roond the head. I heerd the mate tell Jo so."

"Indeed! And the lady is above there in the storm," whispered Brian, huskily, as his voice grew tired and faint, "and away from me. It's strange. Tell her to come down, please. I am waiting."

The boy made his way towards the ladder which led to the upper deck, and the trap which had been closed upon him, and finally forced his way into the wind and rain, and swirling waves of sea which came over the ship's side, and a fair proportion of which rushed down the ladder into the murky cabin the instant that the trap was opened.

Brian lay and waited for his lady-love as a knight of old might have done for her whose pleasure it was to minister to his wounds in the good old days when "lady-helps" were fashionable. Mabel Westbrook did not come to him so quickly as he had imagined she



would; that was also very strange, he thought, if she were above there in the storm. Perhaps there was a delicacy about the matter, which he had not sufficiently considered. And she was content to be near him, and yet remain at a respectful distance from him.

That idea had not struck him before, but his ideas were limited at present, and the world was altogether foggy. He was better—he was sure he was coming round—he could remember all that had happened from the time he met Angelo Salmon on the sands, and went for a friendly row with him, which, however, had not ended amicably.

He knew that Angelo had been repentant long since, and anxious, and almost like a brother to him. He could remember many strange dreams and disordered wakings during the last day or two, with Angelo's face gleaming through them watchfully at all hours of the day and night, and with a distress marked on it which he tried vainly to understand, in the fleeting moments when there had been a chance to think.

The ship rocked terribly indeed, and there

came to him a new anxiety, in the consciousness of Mabel's being on board, and of her being lost with him, and through his fault. If the ship went down with her, what an end to her young life! As if he could not have waited a few more hours, before asking Angelo Salmon to bring her to him. She was coming now!

The hatches above were opened quickly for a moment, a woman descended the ladder with difficulty, tottered towards him in his berth, and glared into his white face.

"It is you—Brian!" she exclaimed.

He passed his hand over his forehead with some little effort. Was he dreaming again, and was this one of those miserable transformations peculiar to dreams?

He had expected Mabel Westbrook at his side, and surely this was his sister, whom he had seen last at—ah! he could not recollect that very well at present.

"Dorcas," he murmured, "you here? Did he send for you, then? Would not Mabel come instead?"

Dorcas remained clinging to the side of the

berth, and regarding her brother with the same astonishment.

"I was not sent for. I came on board by stealth, and in the darkness," she answered.

"But you—what is the matter?"

"I have met with a little accident," said Brian cautiously, "but am getting better now. Where's Angelo?"

"Angelo Salmon is not here."

"Not on board the collier? Where is he?" said Brian.

"Did you expect anyone else?" asked Dorcas anxiously.

"He promised to bring Miss Westbrook to me. I wanted to see her," he added, with a heavy sigh; "but still I am glad she has not come."

Dorcas was a prey to a host of conflicting thoughts—the new mystery was bewildering her and setting her jealousy in the background. The appearance of her brother, sick and wounded in the berth of this vessel, was unexpected and singular; did it account for her husband's presence on board, and was there danger to be feared? The sailor lad had

delivered his message whilst Michael Sewell was half asleep, or half dead, and she had descended into the cabin to solve the riddle which perplexed her.

"Tell me what has brought you down so low as this," she urged, "for I do not understand."

"You did not expect to find me here?" her brother asked.

"I did not dream of it."

"Why are you with me?"

"I have been following Michael, as you know," she said in reply; "I thought he was going away with that woman at the hotel, and when he came on board I watched my opportunity, and joined him. But I did him an injustice, Brian—I was very wrong—the woman is not here. He does not care for her a bit!"

Brian Halfday did not appear to be moved to any great exhibition of joy at his sister's vindication of the character of her husband—was not even pleased at the fulfilment of his own prophecy as regarded Michael Sewell. He lay there very thoughtful for a while, with his eyes fixed on the lantern swaying from the roof of the cabin.

"Your husband is on board?" he said at last.

"Yes. And, poor fellow—oh, so ill!"

"I thought I had been dreaming of him—more than once. And it was he, after all," Brian muttered.

"He is here to see after you, to take care of you in Mr. Salmon's absence," said Dorcas.

"Yes, that is it."

"He is exceedingly attentive," replied Brian, almost in his old dry tones.

"And you who have doubted him so long, Brian," she continued, "will do him justice at the last—as I have done."

Brian murmured something, which the raging of the storm did not allow Dorcas to hear. She asked him what he had said, but he did not reply to her question, and the dancing lantern became again an object of great interest.

"Do you see any of my clothes about?" he suddenly inquired.

Dorcas looked round. At the foot of his berth there was a small bundle of something which proved to be the articles of apparel which he had worn on the day of his dispute with Angelo Salmon.

"This is your coat, I think," said Dorcas.

"Is there a pocket-book in it?"

Dorcas prosecuted her researches. Yes, there was a pocket-book.

"Open it."

Dorcas opened it at his request.

"Are there any papers there?"

"No," was the reply.

Brian did not appear surprised or vexed.

"Very likely I left them at the hotel," he said, staring once more at the lantern; "thank you, Dorcas, that will do."

Dorcas restored the pocket-book, set the coat in its place, and regarded her brother curiously.

"You have not told me how you came to this?" she said.

"Fighting," replied Brian.

"Not—with Michael?"

"No, a round or two with Angelo Salmon. I'll tell you all about it when I get better. Meanwhile," he added, "I must rest and think, for I am awfully weak."

"Oh, Brian, you *are* ill!" cried Dorcas, full of a woman's love and sympathy at once. "What can I do for you?"

"Keep as quiet as you can," was his last injunction before he closed his eyes, as if with the faintness that had come upon him. When he recovered himself—how long a time that was he never knew—Dorcas was at his side bending over him, and bathing his forehead, with Michael Sewell a spectator of the operation.

"How are you, old fellow?" said Michael, familiarly, as Brian came back to the working world again.

"Better, thank you," answered Brian; "much better."

CHAPTER XXII.

MICHAEL OFFERS EVERY EXPLANATION.

THE brothers-in-law regarded each other attentively. They were both men on guard, despite their friendly interchange of civilities. The sight of Michael Sewell seemed to restore Brian to consciousness very rapidly, for presently he put his sister's hand aside, and said,

"Thank you, Dorcas, that will do."

"Dorcas thought you were going to die half an hour ago," Michael Sewell said, with a forced laugh; "but I told her you were worth half a hundred dead ones yet."

Brian smiled at Dorcas, and replied,

"I hope so."

"And now you have come to your senses,

Brian, I may as well tell you why I am here," Michael continued.

"I don't think it matters much," Brian said, a little restlessly. "I would prefer to sleep, if you will allow me."

"Just as you like—but Dorcas wishes it."

"Yes, Brian, I wish it," said Dorcas, for herself.

Brian nodded to Michael by way of permission to proceed. He was chary of speech now, a man who was economising the little strength that was left in him.

"I did not think I should be able to help to cheer you to-night, Brian, for I have been infernally ill myself—fit to die, by Jove!" Michael said; "but the wind has changed, and the storm is spent, the mate says; and I have come round wonderfully in the last hour or two."

"Are we near Bridlington?" asked Brian.

Michael Sewell shrugged his shoulders.

"It is hard to tell where we are at present," he replied; "the cursed ship has been blown out of its course, the devil knows where—but we shall make for port as soon as possible."

"That's well," said Brian.

"I shall be glad," said Dorcas, "for there's father to think of. I forgot him altogether when I came on board—I forgot everything."

"Oh! hang your father," said Michael, unceremoniously; "don't bother us about him just now. I want to explain to Brian how it is he finds me here, if you will keep your mouth shut for a moment."

"I will not speak again," said Dorcas, submissively.

"You must know," Brian, that after your skirmish with young Salmon," Michael continued, "I was taken into his confidence, although I kept myself in the background, out of regard to your feelings. I knew you did not like me, and I was content to do good by stealth, lest any extra excitement should upset you. You understand, I suppose?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, you look as if you didn't, with that confounded stare of yours," he said roughly.

Brian turned his eyes to his favourite lantern, which he regarded with attention, in lieu of Michael Sewell. He had not thanked his brother-in-law for his kind thought of him, and

it had not entered his head to do so, which was ungrateful, to say the least of it, Michael considered.

"We wanted—Angelo and myself," he continued, "to keep the matter dark, and we fancied you would come round in an hour or two, and thank us for the course we had adopted—or rather, which we had carried out, according to your first suggestion before you went altogether off your head. So we kept it dark, and Angelo and I—we are stanch friends, I can tell you—have taken it in turns to watch over you since."

"Where is Angelo now?" asked Brian.

It was his old question to Dorcas. He had a habit of repeating his questions until an answer was obtained, it was evident, and it was a habit to which Michael Sewell objected.

"He is not well. He could not undertake the sea-voyage which the doctor recommended for you," was Michael's answer.

"Recommended for me—in this storm?"

"Yes."

"What is the maniac's name?"

"Look here, Brian, it can't possibly matter to

you what his name is," Michael said in an ag-grieved tone of voice; "and I can't get on if you interrupt me in this fashion. I have done my best—I have stood by you when nobody else would—I have undertaken this journey because you should not be left alone—I have been your best friend when I found you floored completely."

Still Brian Halfday did not thank him, which was particularly remarkable.

"And I'll stand by you to the last, old fellow, forgetting and forgiving all the by-gones," he added, laying his hand on Brian's shoulder, "for you are my wife's brother, and one of my kith and kin—you understand that?"

"Yes," responded Brian, shuddering under the friendly touch of his relative by marriage, "but I would prefer Dorcas's looking after me, now she is here."

"To be sure," said Michael frankly—"she is the better nurse. I am only a clumsy hand."

"Exactly. I should like to sleep now, if you don't mind," said Brian.

"Why, you have just woke up," said Michael in disgust.

"Still I am tired," answered Brian.

"Very well, do as you like. I shall be glad to get on deck; I feel terribly queer down here, I can tell you," said Michael.

Michael went above deck and into the fresh air. As he ascended the ladder, Brian felt half disposed to ask another question—the old question as to the reason for Mabel Westbrook's not coming to see him, as he had wished—but he checked himself in time. He could not believe in any reply that might be given by such a liar as had done him the honour of taking his departure, and hence the question was unnecessary. Dorcas turned to him after her husband's departure.

"There!" she said triumphantly, "you believe in him at last? You see what his real nature is for the first time?"

"Oh! yes, I see what his nature is," replied Brian; "but I am in your hands till I get a little stronger, not his. You will remember that?"

"Yes; but how distrustful you are!" she answered.

"Distrust runs in the family, I am afraid," said Brian.

"Oh! I know what you mean," cried Dorcas, "but I do not distrust him now he has given me his word he meant no harm—it was all a silly flirtation, and more that woman's fault than his, and just because he was so handsome. He has explained everything to you very clearly, Brian."

"Very clearly—yes," answered Brian; "now let me rest, and think the best of him that I can."

"You *will* try?"

"I will try, certainly," Brian said. "Give me some water, please—you will find some in that bottle in the rack."

He pointed to an ingenious contrivance near his berth for suspending a small water-bottle and glass without danger of spilling the contents, and Dorcas filled the glass, and gave it to him. After he had drunk, he turned himself feebly on his side, and closed his eyes, and Dorcas Halfday watched him, and thought of the better times that might be coming to them with the better understanding of each other.

Brian thought of many things, but Mabel Westbrook would stand first and foremost, and confuse matters. He wanted to reflect upon his present position so far as his weak brain would allow—why he was in that ship at sea, and with what object Michael Sewell had sailed away with him from Scarborough?—but though there seemed treachery in the background, and a settled plan, which he could not fathom, he preferred to think of Mabel—to wonder when he should see her, and when would be the first opportunity of his communicating with her, and telling her where he was. He should be very glad to meet the light of her full grey eyes again, to tell her how he had longed for her presence—how unhappy, and restless, and dissatisfied he had been without her from the first moments of his consciousness! He was unable to account for Angelo's breach of trust towards him—surely there had been time to deliver the message, and bring Mabel to the ship, unless Michael Sewell had betrayed them? That was the solution to it, he believed already. Michael had been searching in his pocket-book, and had discovered and confis-

cated the copy of Adam Halfday's lost will, the original of which Brian had left in charge of the new curator of Penton until he should return to claim it.

Was he in any real danger from Michael Sewell's hands? He thought there was nothing to alarm him in the position. The crew were friendly and sympathetic, he was on his guard, and Dorcas was there to look after him. He drifted into sleep whilst endeavouring to marshal his ideas into form, and finding them constantly being disturbed by Mabel Westbrook. What was she thinking of his silence all this while? was his last speculation before the world grew very misty, and he lost himself within it.

When he awoke again, the daylight was about him, the hatches were removed from the entrance to the cabin, and the ship rocked less violently, or else the lantern, now extinguished, had become less volatile. He felt the better and stronger for his sleep, too, and his first thought on waking was that the worst was over, and he should shortly be himself again. Only a day or two more of this weakness and

prostration, and then the new life, bright and radiant, and even Angelo Salmon glad to find him well!

He turned in his berth, and discovered Michael Sewell at his bedside, as if he had never left it. Michael was examining the water-bottle and glass arrangement to which we have alluded, but he faced Brian quickly, as the movement of the bedclothes assured him that the invalid was waking.

"Well," he said, "how are you by this time, Brian?"

"Better," was the reply.

"I'm glad to hear it. Stronger altogether, do you think?"

"Yes, stronger altogether," repeated Brian. "Where is Dorcas? I thought she was——"

Then Brian came to a full stop, as if it were not worth while troubling his brother-in-law with the nature of his thoughts.

"Dorcas is feeling the effect of coming on board ship," said Michael, "and is not so well as she was. How she has stood it all this time the Lord knows,—I don't. But she's sick

enough now—and serve her right too,” he added.

“Is she on deck?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t disturb her on my account,” said Brian. “I do not require any attendance at present. Is the storm over.”

“Yes, and be damned to it; but I haven’t come down to talk about the storm,” he replied.

“I would rather you would not talk at all,” said Brian, quietly. “Conversation does me no good in my present state of health.”

“But I want to talk to you, and seriously too,” said Michael, bluntly; “and we may not have another chance.”

Brian regarded his sister’s husband cautiously and critically. With the absence of Dorcas the manner of the man had changed, and there was a heavy shadow, which was significant, upon his face.

“Go on,” said Brian, “let me hear what you have to say.”

“There’s no talking business before that foolish wife of mine,” Michael Sewell continued, “and this is a serious business, or I am much

mistaken. You came to Scarborough with the fixed intention of reducing me to beggary—in some way or other your spies tracked me to the ‘Mastodon,’ and you followed at their heels. That was not fair or straightforward, and I don’t like it.”

“I hadn’t an idea you were in Yorkshire,” Brian replied.

“It’s a lie, Brian,” said Michael, “and it’s no use my pretending to believe what you say. I have proofs to the contrary.”

“What are they?”

“When you were very bad—raving, in fact—I thought you would die, and that I had better look after your effects, and take possession of them before anyone else interfered. I opened your pocket-book for one thing,” Michael confessed.

“And took away the copy of Adam Halfday’s last will,” Brian concluded for him.

“I own it,” said Michael, “and I will own more than that. If it had been the will itself, I should have taken it and destroyed it.”

“Well,” said Brian, “it’s a plain acknow-

ledgment. I am glad I left the original behind me."

"I would have destroyed it for your sister's sake as well as mine," Michael said, "to save the misery and excitement which the production of another will would create. For, look here, Brian, I will fight your claim to the death, if I spend every penny on law to defend myself. I will dispute the genuineness of that cursed document inch by inch."

"You will have no case," said Brian calmly.

"Or I'll bolt with the money, rather than you shall have it," he remarked.

"It will not be the first time you have bolted," was Brian's caustic response.

It was an unwise answer for a man so much in Michael Sewell's power as he was, and Brian felt it was so the instant after the taunt had escaped his lips. He was always saying imprudent or harsh things—it was his old habit strong upon him, and a sign that he was getting better, unless this was the ruling habit "strong in death!"

Michael Sewell's face deepened in colour with the rage at his heart.

"If you weren't flat on your back, I should have put you there for that speech," he burst forth. "Don't say anything like it again, if we're to keep friends, or you value the little life left in you."

Brian Halfday was not dismayed by this explosion of wrath.

He kept his eyes on Michael, and said,

"I don't want this money for myself, and I shall not take it from you to enrich myself."

"I did not believe that rubbishy tale about restoring it to Miss Westbrook, until a few days since; but, if you are going to marry the Yankee girl, that's another matter," said Michael.

"Think so, if you will. It is hardly worth discussing," replied Brian.

"Oh! by Heaven, but it is!" cried Michael, furiously. "I am not going to be worried grey before my time by your infernal opposition! I say it's time to speak out."

"Speak out, then," Brian said. "I cannot escape you, it is evident."

Michael Sewell did not respond readily to this invitation. He had failed to frighten Brian

Halfday even in the weak condition in which the ex-curator was; and with the exception of a terrible alternative, there was not much to be done.

"Look here," he said, in a low sullen tone, "cannot we compromise this affair without the law's interference? You would not leave me and your own sister to starve? Suppose we halve the amount of what is left, and say nothing of the new will that has turned up."

"I cannot agree to anything."

"Why not?"

"It is Miss Westbrook's money. See Miss Westbrook for yourself, and make that restitution to her which your honour demands," said Brian.

"Oh! yes," said Michael, ironically, "she's too fond of me—much!"

"You may trust her to be generous."

"May I?" he rejoined. "I shall not attempt so dangerous an experiment as to trust myself to any woman."

"As you please."

"That is all you have to say about this will?" Michael asked.

"Save this—that I will destroy it if you or Dorcas will place in Mabel Westbrook's hands the money which belongs to her," said Brian.

"You mean all the money that's left?" said Michael, with a short laugh.

"Well—all that is left?"

Michael Sewell walked about for a minute or two in a state of indecision of purpose that was remarkable, then he stopped at the head of Brian's berth and said,

"If you were to die to-day, Dorcas would be the next of kin."

"But I am not going to die," Brian replied.

"Life is uncertain, Brian," Michael replied gloomily; "and you are subject to strange relapses, that even your doctors cannot understand. The crew bear testimony to that."

"I shall have no further relapse," Brian affirmed confidently; "and I am not quite certain that I cannot leave my berth."

"And you will consent to no compromise?"

"Not for myself," was Brian's answer.

Michael stamped his foot upon the floor, muttered an oath, and said,

"Do what you will, then, and all the harm that follows be on your own head."

"I am not afraid."

"Your fault—not mine. By God! not mine," Michael Sewell shouted, as he tramped heavily and fiercely up the stairs to the deck. When he was in the fresh air he came to a full stop, turned very white, and put his hands to his thick neck-cloth to loosen it, as though a sense of suffocation had suddenly come over him. Dorcas, who seemed ever on the alert when her husband was in question, saw him from her place on deck, and rose to approach him, or resume her watch by Brian's side. He had turned, however, and descended two stairs of the cabin, as if to exchange a few more words with Brian, then he changed his mind and stepped back on deck, with so awful a look upon his face that her own heart sank, as though a mask had dropped from him and showed her what he was. She shrank back instinctively, and he did not see her as he walked to the ship's side, and stood with his left hand clutching at the rigging, and his eyes glaring out at sea.

It was a fixed, set look, that nothing seemed

to alter—a man struck suddenly to stone might have looked like it. Had anything happened to Brian, she wondered; but she did not run and see for herself. There was that in her husband's appearance which held her spell-bound where she was. The sailor-lad was diving head foremost into the cabin, to inquire after the health of the man he had helped to nurse, and he would scream or cry out if Michael had killed her brother. If Michael had killed him! What a foul, wicked thought to cross her mind, when Michael was always to be trusted—and as anxious about Brian's recovery as she was!

The minutes dragged on slowly, but all was quiet in Brian's berth. The sailor-boy remained below, and she fancied she could hear him laughing with her brother; whilst Michael Sewell still stared out at sea with those dead eyes of his.

Suddenly his right hand wandered to his breast-pocket, and for the first time he glanced round with a quick, nervous expression, as of a man fearful of being watched at a crisis in his life. He did not see Dorcas, although she was approaching him stealthily—it was the

movements of the crew in which he was interested, not his wife. He had utterly forgotten her.

She was at his side, however, and clinging to his wrist with nervous fingers, the instant he had withdrawn his hand from his pocket. There was something in his hand, and she had guessed what it was, and was struggling to secure it. He uttered an oath in his surprise at being taken unawares, and endeavoured to free himself from the clutch of his wife, but in vain. She was possessed in her new frenzy of a strength greater than his own.

"Give me that!—give it me, Michael!" she cried. "I will have it!"

"Give you what?" he muttered, between his teeth.

"The phial—you know it is—the poison!"

"Well, haven't I had enough of life?" he asked suddenly. "What will life be worth after your brother has ruined me?"

"Oh! Michael, is it that? I was afraid you—but how can he ruin you? How is it possible?"

"There is another will. It is my life or his,"

he said in a low whisper; "which is it to be?"

"You are mad, Michael! Give me the phial, and then I'll speak!" cried Dorcas. "I cannot trust you with the phial."

He strove to free himself from her clutch again, and this time with success, but the phial slipped from his grasp in the effort, and went rolling, unbroken, along the deck. Dorcas, with a shriek that attracted the attention of the crew, dashed at it and secured it. The phial was corked still, *but empty!*

Michael was close at her side again.

"Be silent, for God's sake, for mine!" he hissed in her ears.

Dorcas recoiled from him, and went swiftly back towards the cabin, and he stood still and let her go, until she had reached the first step downwards, when he followed her.

"I am sorry, Dorcas! I was mad and desperate!" he said. "Save him!—I don't want to kill him now. I am not so bad as that."

"Ha! Heaven help us, how is it to be done?" she cried.

"The water-bottle—empty it," he whispered —"quick!"

Doreen dashed down the steps to find the sailor-boy at the side of Brian's berth, and Brian talking to him. There was an empty glass in Brian's hand, and he was giving it back to his rough attendant as she ran towards him.

"Have you—have you drunk the water, Brian?" Doreen cried. "Oh! for Heaven's sake tell me."

"Yes," replied her brother, "I have. What of it?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUSINESS-LIKE TO THE LAST.

THE long wail of despair which followed Brian's reply to his sister's question, the look of horror in Dorcas Halfday's face, the sudden prostration of strength which left the woman as helpless as the dead, were all evidence of great danger to the invalid. Brian drew a short quick breath of surprise, and then lay and considered the position, with his gaze directed to the miserable Dorcas.

"I have been poisoned, then?" he said, very calmly at last.

Dorcas crawled down upon the damp floor of the cabin, and turned her face away from him.

"Yes," she answered—"oh! God forgive us all, yes!"

“By your husband?”

“It was my fault,” she murmured. “I had been carrying poison with me ever since I had grown jealous of my husband, and if I had failed in my revenge upon the woman—if it had been as bad as I suspected, I should have drunk it. I told Michael so to-night, and he took the poison from me.”

“And put it into that water-bottle,” said Brian, “which I have just emptied of its contents. What poison was it?”

Brian had become very cool and grave; he was face to face with death, he saw, and would have to meet it shortly. This was the end of his existence and his vain ambitions. He had passed from one danger to another, and his enemies had been too strong for him; but the worst being come, the prospect did not daunt him. He had done no harm to man or woman in his day; he had striven more than once to effect some good, and his nerves were quickly and bravely steeled to the inevitable.

Dorcas told him what poison she had purchased by small instalments of various drug-

gists in the town, and what excuses she had made for procuring it, and he listened to her with attention.

"It is a poison sure enough in its effect," he said, very calmly, "but it will give me an hour or two's grace, for which I am thankful."

"But will you not do something at once?—cannot something be done? Oh! my poor Brian," cried Dorcas, wringing her hands, "you will not die without an effort to save yourself!"

"There is no doctor on board," he replied. "I am too weak for violent remedies, and I will not chance further prostration with important business to transact. I have work to do that requires a steady brain, Dorcas, and you must help me."

"Oh! I cannot do anything—I am going mad!" cried Dorcas.

"Try and be calm to oblige me," he said sternly now, "unless you are thinking of your husband's position rather than of mine."

"No, he is a villain!" she said, shuddering. "I will not think of him—I will not care for him again—although," she added, with a strange leap towards the extenuating circumstances,

such as they were, of the case, "he grew alarmed just now, and told me to come and save you. He did indeed, Brian! It was a moment's impulse that made him put the poison in the water; he had not brought it with him; he had no intention of harming you half an hour ago; he——"

"Let the scamp be; we will talk of him presently, if there is time," said Brian, more restlessly. "Tom," to the lad who was standing open-mouthed and terror-stricken, "find me pen, ink, and paper, there's a good fellow, and look sharp about it."

The boy, released from the spell that had oppressed him, rushed from the cabin to the deck, but with no intention of procuring the writing materials which Brian had asked for, and which were already in the cabin itself. There had been murder doing, now there was justice to be done, and the crew to consult; the victim had been kind and grateful for his rough care of him, and Tom had learned to like Brian very much. The boy's excitement, once loosed, was intense, and was quickly communicated to

the crew, who saw at once the extra responsibility incurred by the desperate action of Michael Sewell.

Brian waited impatiently for the pen and ink, and listened to the scuffling of heavily-shod feet above deck, and the angry cries of many voices, and speculated as to the cause of the uproar. He had not thought of the lad's communicating the facts to the sailors, until the boy's return, accompanied by the captain of the collier and one or two of the crew, who all came tumbling down the stairs together.

"Is it true?—has he poisoned you?—how did he do it?" were the questions hurled at Brian.

"It is quite true. Don't make any more noise than you can help," answered Brian—"don't disturb me longer than you can help either."

"He shall swing for it!" cried the captain, with one or two strong oaths. "We've tied him hand and foot, and he don't stir again till we hand him over to the police at Bridlington. We've had enough of that fellow; he's brought

a sight of trouble on the lot of us, and I don't see the end of it."

"Get me pen, ink, and paper, please, and don't talk," said Brian, irritably.

"Ah! we shall want your deposition—you shall have the pen and paper. Don't you feel awfully queer now, sir?"

"Not yet."

"You look like it," was the answer. "Here, drink this off at once—it will do you good."

"What is it?" asked Brian, as a cup of mysterious liquid was proffered him.

"Mustard and warm water. It's the best thing for——"

"Not for this," replied Brian, putting the cup aside with his weak hand. "I have a faint knowledge of antidotes, and this will only render matters worse, I am sure."

"You don't say that!" said the mate of the ship. "Oh! good Lord, then you are really going to die?"

"In good time—possibly."

"We shall be in the harbour in another hour, we shall find a doctor there. Can't you keep

up for another hour, sir, don't you think?" inquired the captain.

"I am going to try," was Brian's quiet answer.

"That's well. Try as hard as you can. And tell somebody—everybody—we had nothing to do with this. You won't forget that, please—you'll write that down first thing mayhap, or we shall be bundled off to prison on suspicion. Oh! dear, dear," exclaimed the captain, "what an awful mess we have got into, to be sure!"

"If you would find me pen and ink, and clear out of this," said Brian, petulantly, "I might get to business at once. You detain me—you annoy me."

"Had we not better look after that woman. She's in it somehow, I know?" asked one of the men.

"This is a good friend of mine, who put me on my guard as soon as she could," answered Brian. "Let that be remembered amongst you when the further troubles come."

"All right, sir."

The crew departed, leaving Brian and his

sister together, and with a small quantity of writing material placed at their disposal, at last.

“Now to business, Dorcas,” he said.

Dorcas was more completely prostrated, mental and bodily, than her brother, who had made intense efforts to collect himself, and had succeeded in the effort. It was strange how much strength was left in him, he thought; how at the last, the very last, it had been mercifully extended to him, so that he might do justice to those in whom he was interested. If he had been a believer in modern miracles, he might have fancied that one of them in this instance was working in his favour, and keeping back that terrible weakness to which he knew he must speedily succumb. The death-warrant had been signed, and he must go; he was not afraid, and for his present self-command and strange renewal of his strength he was intensely grateful. It gave him time to prepare. Dorcas struggled to her feet after some entreaty and a few reproaches, and prepared to write as Brian Halfday dictated to her. It was a composition under difficulties, though the vessel was tossed no

longer violently by the sea, and there were opportunities of hearing even so weak a voice as Brian's. It was the last will and testament of Brian Halfday which Dorcas had been called upon to write, and as she wrote she marvelled at her brother's coolness, and method, and forethought. He left all the money he possessed in the world, with the exception of one legacy, to Mabel Westbrook; he called attention to the fortune of which the last will of Adam Halfday would place his executors and assigns in possession, and which in due course was to become the property of Mabel Westbrook aforesaid; he bequeathed a legacy of five hundred pounds to his sister Dorcas Sewell, and he left a valuable but small collection of fossils and minerals to the trustees of the Penton Museum.

"There, that will do, I think," he said coolly.

"Let me see the copy, Dorcas."

Dorcas placed the will in his hand, and he held it in his short-sighted fashion close to his eyes, and examined it critically.

"I didn't want that five hundred pounds,"

Dorcas said moodily. "What good will it do me?"

"It does not belong to Mabel Westbrook—it is not part and parcel of the restitution-money, and I must think of my own flesh and blood a little."

"Don't think of me, Brian—I am not worth it."

"You may be penniless without it—although I hope Miss Westbrook will look after you," he said, still studying the will.

"But——"

"But Michael Sewell," said Brian. "Well, what of him?"

"Nothing," answered Dorcas. "He will be hanged for this, poor fellow!"

"Poor fellow!" echoed Brian drily—"yes, it is extremely probable. Well, that money will help you in the expenses of his defence, and a clever counsel may get him off with flying colours—who knows? I'll trouble you to alter one or two of these words, Dorcas. We do not spell 'executor' with an *e* in the last syllable, and there's a double *s* in 'fossil.'"

Dorcas took the will back, and regarded him curiously.

"I don't think you are going to die, after all," she said.

"Why not?"

"A man on the point of death would not care how 'fossil' was spelt," she replied.

"It is a document that should be correct in every detail," said Brian, "and one cannot be too particular in the matter of wills. Now, please call two of the crew for witnesses. You are interested in this document, and must not sign."

Dorcas shivered.

"He is on deck—I shall break my heart if I face him, a prisoner. Oh! Brian," she cried, flinging herself close to his side, and clasping her thin hands, "can nothing be done to help him?—nothing?"

"Very little, I am afraid."

"If he could escape—if you could only hear the story of his sudden temptation—if you knew how sorry he was the instant afterwards——"

"Ah! the instant afterwards—that's it," said

Brian, ironically ; "if it were only the instant before that people were sorry or repentant, what a happier world this would be!"

"You blame me for thinking of him, but I can't help it, Brian, even now. I try, but I can't," she cried. "Forgive me—I will do my duty to you, at least."

"Forgiven, Dorcas, readily," he said, laying his hand upon her raven hair ; "it is a woman's error,—with a touch—of heaven in it,—to love the—undeserving too well."

"You are worse!" she cried, as he spoke with his old difficulty and weakness.

"A little faint, for an instant. That's all."

Dorcas ran up the steps at once, forgetting herself and her husband ; and the captain and mate of the vessel came downstairs again at her appeal. Brian had recovered from his faintness by that time, or was strong enough to repress any exhibition of it when they were close to his berth. He looked at them very steadily.

"I want you two gentlemen to witness my signature," he said, "and to affix your own afterwards, with your address, on the left-hand corner of the document. See, now."

Brian affixed his name to the will, and the sailors watched the operation closely.

"You've a steady hand yet, sir," observed the captain.

"You'll pull through," said the mate, "and that infernal blackguard upstairs will escape hanging."

"Sign, please," said Brian.

The sailors added their signatures to the will of Brian Halfday, and then the captain said inquiringly,

"That's the deposition, I suppose?"

"A deposition must be made before a magistrate," said Brian. "This is my last will and testament."

"But haven't you said anything about the poisoning?"

"Not at present. It is necessary to write a line or two, though," he added, "to save an innocent woman."

"No, no!" cried Dorcas, passionately—"don't think of me. I brought the poison with me—how do you know I did not come here with the object of killing you? Oh! let me suffer for Michael, if you can!"

"We must make this story very clear, or harm will come of it," said Brian, thoughtfully. "Give me the pen again, and a fresh sheet of paper, please. I think there's time."

But there was neither time nor strength left, for Brian had overtaxed the powers that he had been lately in possession of, and before the paper was given him, he had fainted away. It was a deep swoon, from which he did not quickly recover—it was the first sign of the poison beginning its deadly work, Dorcas thought with horror, and the sister's interest and love grew strong within her once more, and set him who had brought about the mischief into the darkness to which he naturally belonged. Brian rallied again, but it was not on shipboard. All that happened at Bridlington, as the ship sailed into the harbour he learned an hour later, when he had been carried on a litter to a private apartment in the town, where it had been thought a man might die in a convenient and comfortable fashion, without troubling too many people with his premature decease.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NEW NURSE.

THE brightness and freshness of the morning came as a welcome to the returning senses of Brian Halfday, lying in his strange bed, and in a room that was new to him. He came back to what was left to him of this world the same odd observant being whom we have endeavoured to portray to our readers, and his first action was to snatch impatiently at a curtain that hung between him and the light from the opposite window. It was so quickly done that a woman on her knees, in that rare attitude of earnest prayer which is scarce enough in these days, was startled by its suddenness, and gave a faint cry of surprise before she rose to her

feet, and bent over him very tenderly. He looked hard at her, a man doubtful whether it was a living, breathing fact before him, or a fair vision to console him at the last.

"A dream!" he cried, "or is it—*you*?"

"Yes, it is I, Brian."

"My dear Mabel, how glad I am!"

He took the soft white hands in his, and kissed them, and Mabel turned away her head to hide the tears that rose into her eyes.

"I have been waiting for you—oh, so long!" he murmured. "You will not go away again?"

"Never again."

"I shall not keep you a great while," he said, with a faint smile. "What is the hour?"

"Nine o'clock."

"Mine is a slow poison, and not much behind its time yet," said Brian. "Has the doctor been? I seem to have a faint remembrance of swallowing something nasty half an hour ago."

"Yes, he has been," replied Mabel.

"What does he say? Don't hesitate, my dear new nurse, who takes her rightful place here," said Brian; "I know the worst, and am not afraid to hear it from your lips."

"No—you are brave," she murmured.

"What does he think of me?" he asked again.

"He has made many inquiries of your sister and of Michael Sewell, and—and—oh! don't ask me!" she cried, burying her face in the pillow beside him.

His hand rested on her fair young head awhile.

"Courage, Mabel," he said; "I am not much to lose; I have known you such a little time; I have been always irritable, harsh, and exacting with you—always a disagreeable fellow."

"No, no," she said, "it is not true."

"It is for me to give way, for happiness has only seemed a possibility of late days. And yet," he added, "I am strong."

"And resigned—say resigned, Brian."

Brian knitted his brows, as if in opposition still.

"I am not certain," he said testily. "To be poisoned like a rat, to have life and life's ambitions close as suddenly as this, is hard."

"You will say resigned, for my sake," she exclaimed.

"Kiss me, then—for mine."

She bent over him and kissed him lovingly, and he said at once,

“Yes, resigned now.”

There was a silence of a few minutes, in which Mabel sat by the bedside, with her hand in that of Brian, until the sick man said suddenly,

“Where is the will I dictated on board ship?”

“There is a paper on the drawers—is this it?”

She gave it to him, and he opened it and read the contents carefully.

“What an infamous handwriting it is!” he muttered—“and that stupid girl has spelt ‘fossil’ with one s after all. Mabel!”

“Yes,” said Mabel to his appeal.

“Keep this, please,” he said, “and act upon it after I have left you.”

“What does it contain?”

“Restitution to a girl grievously wronged by the Halfdays,” he answered.

“But——”

“But we are not going to talk of the money again; we have always quarrelled when that subject was in question,” he said, interrupting

her, "and this is my last wish, which even a dear little obstinate young woman will respect."

"Yes," she responded in a low voice, "I will do anything you wish, Brian."

"Thank you."

"But I wish you would not think so much of what is to become of me, or the money—not at the last," she said.

"What do you want me to do?"

"To let me read to you from the pages of this book," she said, taking up a Bible from the drawer; "to let me believe you are thinking of the world that lies beyond ours. Oh! Brian, I fear you have not thought enough of that."

"Who has?" he answered, almost mournfully.

"Then let me——"

"Presently," he said, with great firmness; "there is this world, and those I leave within it, to consider first. That is my duty."

"Not now."

"Yes, Mabel, dear, it is," he answered. "As for myself, I have done no one an injury, and the future does not scare me. And now—to business."

"What business can there be to think of now?" she asked.

"I am a business-like man," he said, with a faint smile, "and would leave everything in its proper place upon the shelf."

"Can he be going to die?" thought Mabel, as Dorcas Sewell had thought herself an hour or two since.

His voice was stronger, and his eyes brighter—was it the last flickering of the flame before it went out in the darkness, and left her very desolate?

"In the first place," he said, "how did you get here?—what good genius brought you to my side at the eleventh hour, when I was praying I might see you once again?"

"It was thought by the Scarborough men that the *Mary Grey* must make for Bridlington, or sink," said Mabel, "and we came on by special train to this place, where we found you, Heaven be thanked!"

"Heaven be thanked indeed!" repeated Brian. "And this 'we'—does it mean you and Angelo Salmon?"

"Yes. He is utterly cast down by the

consequences of his rash act; he attributes it all to his miserable jealousy. He is here, waiting anxiously to see you."

"I will see him presently. Poor Angelo!" said Brian.

"Why poor Angelo?" asked Mabel, a little quiver of indignation in her voice.

"He has loved you very desperately and unwisely, Mabel; he has brought much trouble upon himself, as well as upon us. I don't think we treated him very well, and I am sure," Brian added, "that we might have treated him much better. He has something to forgive."

"We acted indiscreetly, perhaps; but, oh! Brian, you and I had misunderstood each other so long!" said Mabel Westbrook.

"Yes; and happiness came suddenly upon us, and we were two weak mortals not wholly unselfish in our loves," he replied. "I should like to speak to Angelo."

"Shall I call him?"

"Not yet," said Brian, very quickly. "I receive my visitors at a later hour."

"Don't jest—oh! my poor Brian, don't jest now!" she cried.

"I am not unhappy. Why should I be very miserable, Mabel, because life ends in contentment, and with few mistakes to rectify, or to atone for? I think I should be wholly happy if——"

"If?" repeated Mabel, as he paused.

The thin fingers closed round hers more tightly.

"If I could look beyond the present time and see what is to become of you—if I were sure that you would be happy in good time yourself," he said.

"Don't think of me—you must not at this hour."

"Oh yes; it is very likely I shall think of anything else at present," said Brian, in his old sharp tones. "I have a great deal to say about you."

"Will you say it quickly, for I have asked a friend to see you?"

Brian looked hard at her.

"A minister, do you mean?" he said.

"Yes."

"You are thoughtful," he replied, "and I have no particular objection—unless it's

Gregory Salmon," he added, with extraordinary quickness, "and I can't stand that old idiot at any price."

Mabel shuddered at his acerbity; it was hardly natural in that hour. It was surely a bad sign that the end was coming more quickly than she had thought.

"Tell me what you have to say concerning me, Brian—will you?" she asked.

"Tell me of yourself first."

"In what way?"

"If I look back at this earth—and there are some philosophers who tell us we may do so in a future state,—how shall I see my lost love in the years to come? As Angelo's wife?" he asked.

"No—no!" cried Mabel, indignantly—"never as his wife, or any man's. He has blighted my whole life; I have not forgiven him—I never, never can!"

The door opened softly and cautiously as she spoke, and Angelo Salmon stood upon the threshold and heard all that Mabel said. He came forward with clasped hands and head

bowed down, a penitent who took his sentence meekly, and accepted it as just.

"Pardon me, both of you," he said, in a hollow voice, "but I could not stay any longer—I am compelled to leave you."

"What do you mean?" asked Brian.

Angelo Salmon looked behind him at the door, where two men were standing, mute, but observant.

"Who are they?" was Mabel's quick inquiry.

"The police," was Angelo's reply; "I have this moment been arrested for the attempted murder of poor Brian. And Brian Halfday's death will lie at my door, I declare now solemnly before you all!"

CHAPTER XXV.

SLOW POISON.

GREATLY to the astonishment of Mabel Westbrook, of Angelo Salmon, and even of the representatives of the constabulary force of Yorkshire, Brian Halfday sat up in bed in his surprise and vexation at the news.

“What’s this?” he cried; “who has arrested you? What for?”

He looked towards the police as if for his answer, and one man stepped forward, cap in hand, and pulled at his front lock of hair by way of salutation to the invalid.

“I beg your pardon, sir. You’re the murdered gentleman, I ’spose?”

“Go on. My name is Brian Halfday,” said

our hero impatiently. "Who has dared to arrest this gentleman?—who prefers in any way a complaint against him?"

"There's been a tremenjeous deal of stir about this affair already, sir," said the policeman, "and we're bound to arrest everyone mixed up in it. The crew of the *Mary Grey* have told us all that's happened; and as this is likely to be a serious matter, the parties implicated have been taken up at once."

Brian lay down in his bed again. His head was disposed to swim, and the result of these further complications was beyond his weak analysis. If he were only a little stronger—if the minutes of his life were not drifting away so quickly—if he could do something to save his rival from the consequences of his old rash act!

"Who are arrested?" he inquired.

"Michael Sewell, for the poisoning business, his wife, the captain of the *Mary Grey*, and this gentleman."

"What has this gentleman to do with the poison I have taken?" asked Brian.

"We don't know anything at present, sir,"

said the policeman, apologetically, but precisely, "we're only acting under orders. We shan't know, you see, sir, how you died, whether from the blow or the poison, until the inquest is held on your remains—if you'll excuse my mentioning them at present."

"Tell these dreadful men to go," cried Mabel, very white; "by what right are they here at all?"

"Business, Mabel, business," said Brian, in a half-reproving tone; "I am very glad they have come."

"Thankee, sir," said the policeman, "and there'll be a magistrate here in a few minutes to take down your depositions, I was told to say."

"I don't know that I have anything to say," replied Brian thoughtfully, "but I shall be prepared for him. But before you take away my friend, understand I make no charge against him, and that I solemnly declare my death does not lie at his door, as he has foolishly stated."

"Why do you say this, Brian?" asked Angelo; "is it worth while, for such a wretch as I am?"

"It is the truth," Brian replied, "and I am anxious to say it for truth's sake."

"I struck you down."

"We had a little quarrel, certainly," said Brian, "but I was more to blame than you, for you were weak and not yourself, and I said bitter things when you grew angry, and so we came to blows. I was getting better when Michael Sewell poisoned me—and you are blameless in this matter, I protest with my last breath."

Angelo Salmon went swiftly to the bedside, stooped and kissed Brian's hand, and then stood up again, erect and firm.

"You are very good to me, but I cannot accept the goodness," he said, "grant your forgiveness instead to the madman that I was. It is the only comfort I can receive in this world."

"Except Mabel's forgiveness also," said Brian.

"Ah! that is beyond my hopes," he replied; "I have blighted her life."

"Mabel," said Brian, "will you say forgiveness with me to this poor friend of ours?"

"Yes—I will, Brian, now," she answered.

They held their hands to Angelo, who took

them in his own, and bowed over them until tears welled from him, which were possibly good for him and his malady.

"I thank you both," he muttered; then he turned away and went out of the room, followed by the police. Brian was silent, and Mabel sat and watched him in silence also. It seemed a long time before his voice broke the stillness of the room, and once more it sounded strong and clear, and with the ring of the old sharpness in it.

"We must get to business," he said, "we have a lot to do still."

"If you would not talk so much of business," urged Mabel.

"Tut—tut," said Brian, "look at the confusion on the top shelf still, when busy hands might set the matter right."

"Is he wandering?" thought Mabel, regarding him askance.

"In the first place—always in the first place—a certain Mabel Westbrook, late of Boston, Massachusetts," said Brian. "She will act upon that will, she will go to ~~Penton Museum~~ in good time, tell the new curator who she is, and

ask for the last will of Adam Halfday of St. Lazarus, and the name of the solicitor who is stirring in this matter, and whom she may trust implicitly."

Mabel did not answer, and he half rose and leaned on his elbow in surprise.

"Are you listening?"

"Yes," she said listlessly, "but such business as this concerns me very little."

"You should consider my instructions, Mabel. Fancy my dying with the thought that you don't understand them," he said, half-peevishly, and half-reproachfully.

"Forgive me, Brian—I will be more attentive," she hastened to say, "I understand everything, but I cannot think of myself."

"Ah! that's very wrong," he replied, lying down again, "for as long as I live I have to think of you. As long as you lived I said once I would do that, but," with a sigh, "I was overconfident, and looked too far ahead."

"Pray say no more," said Mabel.

"We are losing time," he answered, "and it's very remarkable we cannot keep to business this morning. Once more concerning yourself,

then. I went to America some few months since."

Mabel gave a start of surprise at this.

"I wanted to see where all the money had vanished—to find the secret of the collapse of your fortune—and to discover that backwoodsman of whom you told me once. The dry-goods youth was not forthcoming," he added, with a hearty little laugh that was remarkable at this juncture; "but I found out a great deal against that swindling bank."

"Don't tell me now," Mabel pleaded.

"Only this, that there is a chance of retrieving some of the losses, and you are in a better position than many of the shareholders," said Brian. "I have left the whole matter in the hands of a friend of mine out there, and he has promised to write to me very shortly. I daresay I shall hear from him the next—oh! by George, I had forgotten Sewell's mixture! No," he added, "I shall not hear from the gentleman; but you will open his letter in good time, and act upon it for your own sake—and for mine."

"Very well," said Mabel in reply.

"You take no interest in this at present," said

Brian, pressing her hands in his : "but presently life's duties, and the duty to yourself, will come again. I don't want you to forget me, dear—never wholly to forget me—but I shall die unhappy, if I think I am to remain for ever a shadow on my darling's life. Mabel Westbrook must form new friends, new ties, and marry some good fellow who will prize her as much as I should have done—had things been most as different."

"Oh! don't talk in this way," exclaimed Mabel, "spare me, Brian—do!"

"I have wandered from business—I am getting flighty, I suppose," he said quaintly, "and this uncommonly slow poison is beginning to wake up at last."

"You are worse," Mabel cried. "oh! I am sure you are keeping back your feelings—to spare me. Let me ring for——"

"I am not acting, Mabel," said Brian. "on the contrary, and this is the remarkable part of it, I cannot quite realize the idea that I am standing on the brink of my grave. If it were not so deadly and insidious a poison, I should be disposed to believe I was getting rapidly better.

but that can't be. Dorcas's story was too plain and simple—and the worst must come."

"My poor Brian!"

"And there is so much business before us—and we can't keep to business," said Brian tetchily again; "there is Angelo Salmon to save, now that he is in his sober senses, and you will have to be the principal witness in his favour, and to remember all I say in explanation of the causes of the quarrel. That it was my fault in particular, that I aggravated a man not responsible for his actions, that he did not hurt me, and that I was getting well fast, when Michael Sewell thought it would be more convenient to all parties to get me out of the world. You will say this at a fitting opportunity, Mabel?"

"Yes," she promised.

"I will state the same in the deposition, if there's time," said Brian; "and as for Sewell—well, he's an awful scamp, but I fancy he's sorry for the success of his scheme, especially as it is likely to hang him. Dorcas tells me he repented of his crime before he knew I had drunk the water, and that he begged her to

come and save me. If that's true, tell him some day I forgive him. It may make his last hour as full of peace as mine is."

"And now——"

"And now, the sooner the magistrate turns up the better, perhaps; and then an end of business for ever!"

"Do you feel any weaker, Brian?" she asked anxiously.

"I am sinking——"

"Oh! great Heaven—my dear, dear Brian—not yet!" screamed Mabel—"not so suddenly and awfully as this!"

"No, no—don't be afraid," he exclaimed: "I was going to add when you scared me, sinking *with hunger!*"

"Is it possible?"

"I suppose it is fancy," said Brian—"it must be fancy; but I wonder if there's such an article downstairs as——"

"As what?" asked Mabel eagerly.

"Upon my honour, I hardly like to mention it to you, it seems so superbly ridiculous," said Brian.

"What is it you want?"

“You will not be offended, because it’s more on my mind than—the minister?”

“No, no—what is it, Brian?”

“A MUTTON CHOP!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GREAT POISONING CASE.

THE pleasant town of Bridlington had availed itself of its chance of a sensation, and was stirred to the depths by all the elements of mystery and romance with which the case of Brian Halfday was surrounded. Twelve hours from the arrival of the *Mary Grey* of Sunderland in the harbour of Bridlington, all Yorkshire was talking of the story, exaggerating details and amplifying facts, after the general fashion. Love and jealousy were at the bottom of it, and that rendered the narrative more interesting, culminating, as it seemed, in the murder, or the attempted murder, of the principal character. Who was in love, who had been jeal-

ous, who was going to die, was not particularly clear to the outsiders, but the local papers would have their records presently, and public curiosity would be satisfied. Meanwhile, there were a few incidents for hungry gossipers to feed upon—a ship leaving the harbour of Scarborough in a storm in order to carry away one of the rivals, or the lady, or both; a run for Bridlington, a tragedy by the way, a man borne down the quay on a litter, with a crowd of excited sailors following; a woman waiting for the body, another woman, and her husband, and the captain of the *Mary Grey*, handed over to the police; the son of a clergyman in Pantonshire mixed up in the affair, and placed under arrest—surely these were sufficient items of sensation for the vulgar, and even the highly genteel, to speculate with, until the truth should shine forth in the veracious columns of the daily press.

It was known in Bridlington before midday that the deposition of the victim had been taken by a duly qualified justice of the peace, and that one individual overborne by remorse, or to save the time of the authorities, had

already confessed to that which, under the circumstances, it was extremely difficult for him to deny. Michael Sewell, in fact, was superlatively penitent—an admirable specimen of a man who was sorry for all the wrong he had committed. He pleaded impulse, a sudden fit of temptation, a crime without a method in it; he was ready to plead to everything that would set him in a better light before his fellow-creatures than that of a deliberate and cold-blooded poisoner. He could not affirm too quickly and too emphatically that he never meant to do it, and that before he thought he had done it he had sent his wife in haste to the rescue. He told this, and a great deal more than this, to a solicitor who promised to take his case in hand, but the whole affair was inextricably involved, and neither he nor the lawyer could see how it would end. Everybody was mixed up in it in so remarkable a manner that there seemed as many conspirators in the business as in the Powder Plot of King James of sacred memory.

The police arrived at the conclusion that there was a great deal in it also, and that they

should come at it presently, which, to save time, we may assert at once they never did. They were persevering and energetic in a course that was hopeless from the first, and what they lacked in comprehension they made up in vigilance. They arrested everybody on suspicion, having first talked the county magistrates into issuing warrants for everybody's apprehension. They saw a malefactor or a conspirator in each man or woman connected with the poisoner, or the poisoned, and were half disposed to believe that a Fenian uprising was at the bottom of the whole business. They respected neither place nor person; even the Reverend Gregory Salmon, turning up in the afternoon at Bridlington, was placed immediately under arrest, his actions having been singular on the preceding day at the "Mastodon Hotel," and it being incontestably proved that he was aware of his son's attack upon Brian Halfday, and had been heard on the platform of the railway station at Scarborough imploring his son to be cautious in the matter, for his own sake and the family's.

Mabel, at an earlier period of the mystery,

had not communicated with the detective police in vain, and Gregory Salmon had been under suspicion for a considerable period, for no other reason than that he was the most unlikely person to commit himself to a felonious transaction !

The last arrest connected with a case which threatened to assume gigantic proportions, and become a *cause célèbre* of the British Empire, was made in the afternoon of the Saturday when Brian Halfday was waiting patiently to depart from a world of disappointments, and marvelling at the action, or the want of action, of the exceedingly slow poison which Michael Sewel had administered to him. In his last moments, Brian, always of a studious turn of mind, thought it would be advisable to become a philosopher. Having settled every detail of his business, made his deposition, talked to the minister, and eaten a mutton chop, to the amazement of his doctor, who came in whilst he was picking the bone, he set himself to study the properties of the poison from the pages of a medical book, which Mabel, as curious as himself, was enabled to procure for him in the town. He had found it impossible to glean information

from the doctor, who was more than usually cautious, even for a doctor, in expressing an opinion on a case which was becoming the more extraordinary the longer it lasted ; and he sat in a dressing-gown before the fire, endeavouring to solve the mystery for himself. He was of a scientific turn of mind, and thought that he should be able to discover something presently, if he had time, and if Mabel's presence did not distract him too much. The patient would show great irritability, the book said, under the effects of the poison, and it would be as well to humour any delusion with which the victim might be afflicted. His delusion evidently was that he was becoming stronger, and hence he had insisted on getting up, and in borrowing a dressing-gown for the occasion—all of which eccentricity was a bad sign, unless the antidote, although given some hours behind time, had proved a complete and triumphant success. Doctor Borland was half disposed to believe in the efficacy of the antidote, and to thank Heaven that he had been called in time to be of service to suffering humanity. He had more than a fond hope,

too, that Brian had not taken as much poison as his sister had declared he had, and that there had been a considerable amount of exaggeration in the matter altogether. Still there might come a terrible and sudden collapse, and he warned Mabel of this as likely to occur at any instant; and poor Mabel sat and watched her lover very anxiously, as he bent over his book, and made notes on the margin with a lead-pencil, and went into sundry algebraic calculations with great intentness. Suddenly he closed the volume with a bang that brought her heart into her mouth.

"I can't make it out—it is a poison that should have behaved itself in a more rational manner," he cried. "By every calculation under the sun, I ought to have been dead about six hours."

"Oh! Brian—don't!" cried Mabel.

"All the chemists could not have been in league to deceive Dorcas," said Brian; "and she bought it by separate instalments. Perhaps some of them were out of the article, and gave her something less hurtful instead, and in mixing it together, the quality has got de-

teriorated. It's always as well to get your articles direct from the Apothecaries Hall, in London. In my little experiments I have been very particular about that."

"Brian," said Mabel, "I—I don't think you could talk like this if you were getting worse. And yet I am afraid to hope—unless you give me hope."

"No, we must not be sanguine, Mabel," he said, very gravely now, "but time steals on in our favour, and the life is not all gone out of me."

"Heaven has heard my prayers, I trust," said Mabel fervently.

"Heaven will not interfere, if I have been fool enough to take half an ounce of the genuine article, Mabel," he said drily; "but I can't reconcile my symptoms with the stuff sold to Dorcas. Unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless my previous prostration has delayed matters, instead of precipitating them, as I thought they would have done. Why are you looking at your watch?"

"I am expecting a friend."

"Not another minister," said Brian, with alarm.

"No."

"Another doctor—ah! you will deceive me even at the last, true woman that you are," he said, pressing his arm round her and drawing her for an instant to his side.

Mabel released herself from him gently, but she was sure that he was getting stronger by degrees!

"I telegraphed to York, at Doctor Borland's request, some hours ago," Mabel confessed.

"Thank you," he replied; "I shall be glad of a second opinion. I don't want to die if I can help it—although," he added, "I don't fear death. I suppose it is Mabel Westbrook who has made me brave."

"No—your own good heart, Brian."

"Don't flatter me—you know I am the most aggravating man whom you have ever met. You have told me so before."

"I can't bear to hear you jest, Brian," said Mabel.

"Ah! it was no jest to me then," he said—"come in!"

The last words were uttered with his old sharpness as a knock sounded on the panels of the door. Mabel opened the door the instant afterwards.

"Is it the other doctor?" asked Brian, as Mabel paused and looked beyond her into the landing-place without.

"No," replied Mabel.

"Who is it, then?—another policeman?"

"No," she said. "One minute, Brian. Patience, dear."

She passed out of the room, and closed the door behind her. The servant was beckoning mysteriously to her on the landing-place, and she went towards her.

"The gentleman ain't dead, miss," the girl asked, "is he?"

Mabel shivered at the crude inquiry.

"No," she said; "what is it?"

"Somebody downstairs as wishes to see him particular—he's terrible cut up at the news too, which he has only just heard, he says," replied the servant; "and he's shaking all over like a jelly-fish."

"Who is it?"

"His father."

Mabel hesitated, and then said,

"Let him come up directly."

She returned to the room, where Brian's dark eyes met hers inquiringly.

"Some one has called, Brian, of whom you have spoken harshly more than once," said Mabel.

"Who is it?"

"Your father."

Brian thought over this announcement.

"I said I would never forgive that man," said Brian; "but it is too late in the day to bear ill-will against him."

"You will see him, then?"

"Yes—I will see him."

There was a scuffling outside the door as he spoke, and a feeble hand tapping without. Mabel rose and admitted the visitor, who tottered in, a poor, decrepit, poverty-stricken being, wrecked for ever of all health and strength and nerve. He burst into tears at the first sight of Brian, and would have fallen upon him, had not Mabel seized him by the arms and placed him in the chair which she had recently quitted.

"Oh, my poor, dear boy, what does it all mean? What is the matter—what has happened to you?" he cried.

"Have you not heard?" Brian rejoined.

"I have heard all kinds of things—I don't know what to believe and what to doubt. I'm not strong enough to be taken off my guard like this, without any preparation," he said. "You don't know how very weak I am—nobody knows or cares, or they would have more consideration for me. I'm completely broken down, Brian, since I had the pleasure of seeing you last—I am, indeed."

He sobbed afresh at the recapitulation of his own misfortunes, until Mabel Westbrook touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"You are unmindful of the feelings of your son," she said; "you distress him."

"No; he does not distress me in the least," Brian remarked, "although I am sure to see the change in him."

"Thank you, Brian, for your sympathy. I thought you would be. I told Laura long ago you would, if you ever caught sight of me. I said to her only a week since that if you knew

how bad I had got, you would be one of the first to take care of me, and find me a comfortable corner in your house somewhere, where I could be carefully nursed—not jumbled together like a bag of bones and dropped anywhere,” he added, “as Michael Sewell drops me. Curse him!”

Mabel, a watchful nurse in Brian’s service, would have interposed again, had not Brian raised his hand.

“Let him be, Mabel,” he said, “he is excited. He will be better presently.”

“This is Mabel Westbrook?” William Halfday said.

“Yes—it is.”

“I am pleased to make your acquaintance, madam—I am highly honoured,” he said, without looking in her direction. “You see before you, in Brian Halfday’s father, a poor trodden-down nonentity. Times are changed since your father and I were friends together, and that boy loved me.”

Brian waited for his father to cease weeping less hysterically before he said—

“What has brought you to Bridlington?”

"What has brought me!" he said, with a little feeble shriek—"why, you; I have said so already."

"How did you discover me?" asked the son.

"You are the talk of the country," said William Halfday, "and everybody is speaking of your murder. I have been in terrible suspense the last four-and-twenty hours, for Dorcas deserted me, and left only three-and-sixpence on the mantelpiece, and nothing to eat in the house—said she was coming back in an hour, and never came near me again. Pretty treatment that, madam," he said, turning towards Mabel at last—"from one's own daughter, too, and I so dreadfully ill! If she had thought a little more of me, and a little less of that trumpery husband of hers, it would have been far more creditable to her in every way. But I'm an utter wreck, and without a soul in the world to care for me."

"There, don't cry again," said Brian quickly; "it will do you no good, and it takes up a deal of your time. So you heard of my murder, Mr. Halfday—and terribly shocked you were, of course?"

"You might have knocked me down with a feather," replied his father, "for I was very weak this morning, not having had proper attention or proper nourishment since six o'clock last night. A dreadful time to leave a man in my delicate condition—only think of it!"

"Yes, I am thinking of it," said Brian.

"And as for the facts of the case, I was fairly bewildered in endeavouring to discover them," William Halfday continued, "but that Dorcas and Michael were taken up at Bridlington, and Michael had tried to kill you—just like him! the wretch would kill anybody in his tempers—was sufficient for me to act upon. I came on at once, weak as I was; and here I am, and if you have got any brandy and water about—half a thimbleful—I'll take it as a mercy."

Mabel looked towards Brian, who nodded his head. Mr. William Halfday was completely prostrated, and required a stimulant, it was evident, and Mabel tendered him a glass of cold brandy and water, which he drank with avidity, and with his teeth rattling against the glass.

"Thank you very much," he said, giving

back the empty glass, "I am exceedingly obliged to you. My gratitude is none the less genuine for being a poor dependent on your bounty. And you are really going to leave us, Brian?"

"The doctor says so," answered his son.

"And with Michael taken up for the act, and Dorcas under arrest also, I suppose—ahem—it has not struck you very forcibly what is to become of me?" said William Halfday; "but it is a serious position. I am entirely helpless. I don't know what to do. I haven't a friend in the whole world, upon my soul."

Brian shrugged his shoulders, but he did not respond harshly to this poor exhibition of selfishness. It was natural that this man should think of himself in his weakness as much as he had done in his strength, and care as little for the weakness of others. The troubles closing round William Halfday, rather than the night-drawing in upon the son, had been this man's first thought in coming to Bridlington.

"No—I have not considered you a great deal," Brian confessed.

"Don't apologise," said the father.

"I have even made my will this afternoon without a thought of you."

"I am astonished at that," replied William Halfday, "for when a man is setting his house in order, he should think of all those by whom he has been surrounded, and of those ties of kindred which, growing strong at the last, elevate a man above the petty animosities of this world. It is not too late to make a codicil, you know. You're looking pretty strong still."

"Strange being," said Brian, mournfully regarding him, "I have taken your neglect of me all my life as a grievance—surely it was a blessing in disguise."

"I—I don't know what you mean," stammered his father, as he looked away from him.

"See to him now and then, Mabel, if I should die," said Brian, "don't let him starve."

"He is your father," murmured Mabel, "and therefore——"

"No fresh promises—no new task beyond your strength—no more mistakes," cried Brian, energetically. "I will not have your life devoted to one who has done his best to shipwreck yours. I only ask you to see to him now

and then—to make sure he is in good hands, and so to leave him there. This man is deserving of less from you, and must have no more.”

William Halfday shook with greater force.

“I don’t know,” he said, tremulously, “that I ever heard a crueler speech than that—from a man in your position, too.”

“The Halfdays must never cross her happiness again—they have been from first to last a blight upon her,” muttered Brian. “If I could have only lived to make amends!”

“You have,” answered Mabel, earnestly.

“If by some miracle this poison failed in its effect——”

“What’s that?” said William Halfday. “Is it poison you have taken?”

“Yes—poison.”

“Administered by Michael Sewell?” asked the father.

“Yes.”

“But was it not Michael Sewell who attacked you in a boat on the sea, along with Mr. Salmon and the captain of a pirate—I mean a collier vessel? I have heard nothing about poison,” said his father.

"The news has got mixed," said Brian. "Your daughter Dorcas carried poison with her to make short work of her own life, and Michael took it from her for precaution's sake. Finding me in the way somewhat, and the poison handy, he tilted it into my water-bottle—and here's the result."

"But that poison—was it in a small phial—fluted?" inquired William Halfday.

"I don't know."

"You are sure Dorcas had it in her possession yesterday—that it was taken from Dorcas by her husband?" he cried.

"Yes."

"Then you are no more poisoned than I am," said William Halfday, rubbing his hands together in his excitement and satisfaction, "and there will be somebody left in the world to see to me, after all!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Brian.

"I was afraid of Dorcas. I had been afraid of her and her moods for the last four days, and when she told me sullenly she did not think she should live much longer, and I found out she was carrying a phial with her,

one night, when she was asleep, I emptied it of its contents, and filled it with water instead."

"Thank God!" cried Mabel.

"Amen!" said Brian; and then the lovers forgot present company, and embraced each other from sheer excess of joy, whilst Mr. William Halfday regarded them with astonishment, and seemed even a little shocked.

"You will excuse us," said Brian, after a while, "but we have had so little happiness in our two lives that we are compelled to snatch it as it flies past."

"And I have made you two happy, then?" said the father. "I am very glad. I—I have really no remembrance of making anybody happy before."

"You have saved the life of your son," said Mabel.

"I am glad of it—he will not forget me for it, I daresay," replied William Halfday with alacrity; "and although I was thinking of Dorcas at the time, and how awkwardly situated I should be without her, yet my prudence and forethought have had some good results

after all. Allow me to thank God, too, that this dear boy is spared to me!"

"All right," said Brian, "but you can do that presently."

"Certainly. I am in no particular hurry, and if you could favour me with one more thimbleful of your brandy and water, to steady nerves that have been seriously shaken by this dreadful excitement and suspense, I should be obliged," said Mr. Halfday.

A glass of brandy and water having been tendered him, Mr. Halfday raised it in his shaking hand, and nodded cheerfully at the couple facing him.

"I see how it is," he said, with a violent wink convulsing his whole countenance—"here's health to you both, and good luck!"

"Health and good luck," repeated Brian—"well, Mabel, perhaps they are coming at last."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER THE STORMS.

BRIAN HALFDAY was right—health and good luck were to follow all the miseries and misconceptions with which that year had begun for him and Mabel. The trials of life had been short and sharp, but were to remain for ever memorable. After all, there was nothing much to regret in them, and a great deal to look back upon gratefully—the fair landmarks in the history of a true affection. If Mabel, in her rash, unselfish consideration for the peace of mind of other folk, had nearly shipwrecked her own, still her mistakes were on the right side of the heart, and all was well that ended so well and brightly as this.

The great case collapsed like a bubble after it was discovered that nobody had been poisoned. Michael Sewell laughed very heartily when the news first reached him, and said he was aware of it all along, for he had tasted the stuff in the bottle after taking it from his wife's hands; but the only person disposed to believe him was that wife herself, who considered it extremely probable, and just in Michael's style!

There was a grand unlocking of police cells, and a grand procession therefrom—Michael Sewell and Dorcas, Angelo and his indignant father, and the captain of the *Mary Grey*, the latter vowing that he would make a case of damages for his detention, but exceedingly glad nevertheless that he had got well out of a troublesome piece of business. Concerning the skirmish between Angelo and Brian in the boat, that for ever remained a mystery to those not closely concerned. Angelo was silent, and Brian said laughingly to a few who were inquisitive that, when he got better, he should consider the expediency of taking out a summons for the assault, only unfortunately he had no witnesses to support the charge. To Angelo

he was above all jesting. The love of this weak-minded young fellow was to be respected for all time, even if his jealousy was to be deplored.

Angelo had sobered down, and become a grave and thoughtful man. Eccentricity had died out with his one violent dash at revenge. The rivals had become friends, and Angelo was grateful that Brian's life had been spared. The clergyman's son was not of the stuff of which malefactors are made, and he had approached so closely to the verge of crime, that to be saved at the eleventh hour was to render him a stronger and better man henceforth.

"You will not desert us, Angelo," said Brian to him one day, when there was a rumour of the date's being fixed for Brian's marriage with Mabel; "you will show your friendship and your courage, your forgiveness even by being with us then."

Angelo wavered.

"It may be beyond my strength, but I should like to be there," he answered.

"You will come for our sake as well as your own," said Mabel, who was looking at him

nervous of the experiment which Brian had suggested.

Angelo fell into his own odd embarrassed manner, which had been missing from him for a long time. It was a good sign, the lovers thought.

"Thank you. I—I think I'll come. If I might be allowed to—to give Brian away, I should feel more easy in my mind," he said.

"To give Brian away!" exclaimed the bewildered Mabel.

"Oh! I forgot, it's the giving the bride away, isn't it?" he stammered; "well, it's about the same thing, only I should have liked to pass Brian over, just to show there's no jealousy of him left in my heart."

"Wouldn't giving Mabel away answer the the same end?" suggested Brian.

"Well—yes, but Mabel might not like me to do that," he said, looking at her wistfully.

"Are you not the oldest friend I have in England?" asked Mabel.

"Thank you," Angelo answered.

So Angelo Salmon gave the bride away, to the astonishment of many of his friends, and

was as brave and strong as Brian had prophesied that he would be. He was proud of his task, too; it was a sign that Mabel had forgiven him completely, and his heart was lighter, not heavier in consequence.

"I give her to one who will be strong enough to protect her against the troubles of this world," he said at a later hour. "I should have been always too weak for that, I am afraid."

But we are precipitating a crisis by a page or two, and ere the curtain is rung down upon our characters, we would for the last time speak of the strange adventures of the money which Mabel Westbrook had brought from America to benefit the Halfdays.

It was in Penton, where our story opens, that it closes. Where the shadows began in the twilight of one April day to steal over the life of Mabel Westbrook, the brighter life commenced and the darkness sank back beyond the hills. It was in the old lodgings, too, on the Penton Road, where Mabel had taken refuge for a week or two before her marriage, that Dorcas proved at last that Michael Sewell had his tin of patience, and was not so thorough a man as

everyone acquainted with him was disposed to believe. Mabel was alone when Dòrcas and her husband called upon her ; but Brian appeared before the interview was over, followed by his father, who was nervous concerning the movements of these four, and did not care to be long out of their sight, lest he should drop also from their recollections, before anything was settled about him or—settled upon him !

Dorcas was looking bright and pretty again ; her husband had made large promises of amendment, and spoken of the lesson in life which had been taught him by adversity. He had escaped hanging by a “fluke,” and he was young enough to value life, and shrewd enough to see how one false step had nearly swept him from it. How time would work upon such a character as this, Brian could not guess ; he was not particularly sanguine, but then he was always sceptical, and, as Dorcas said with a sigh, he had never liked Michael, or seen him at his best. Having seen Michael Sewell at his worst, had been quite enough for Brian Halfday.

“I have brought Michael here to ask your pardon for all the trouble and anxiety he has

caused you," Dorcas said very proudly upon her entrance.

"Indeed," said Mabel, who was surprised beyond all composure at her visitors.

"And he will speak up for himself, and tell you what he thinks is just and right on his part," said Dorcas, stepping aside, to allow her husband to emerge into the foreground, and make the speech she had promised for him. "Now, Michael, please."

Thus adjured, Michael Sewell stepped forward, and delivered his oration in his usual abrupt way, whilst Dorcas sat and regarded him admiringly. It was in the middle of the speech that Brian and his father entered, and begged him to continue, and not to consider their presence an interruption, and Michael Sewell went off, after a pause, again.

"I was saying, Brian," he said to our hero, by way of explaining the preliminary portion of his address, which Brian had not heard, "that I am a creature of impulse, and a bit of a fool, rash and headstrong, and all that, and that God knows I have suffered for it as much as any man—and been as sorry afterwards."

"I am glad to hear you are sorry," said Brian drily.

"Ah! and look here, I am going to prove I am sorry. I don't suppose," he said, "that anyone would believe me without I could show I am able to make a sacrifice as well as anybody else. Miss Westbrook," he said, addressing her in particular, "it's a little late in the day, but there is the money—not quite all the money certainly—which you paid to the account of Adam Halfday one day in the Spring."

He placed a packet of notes on the table, adding,

"I have brought it in money—I thought you would prefer it to a cheque."

Mabel seemed to hesitate still.

"I did not think——" she began, when Brian, with his old impetuous rashness, interrupted her.

"Do not talk of the old farce of restitution, Mabel," he said, "for even Adam Halfday's last will restores it to your future husband."

"You must not imagine that the notice of Brian's claim to the estate frightened me at

all," said Michael. "Don't think that, because I could have made off with the lot."

"How much money is there left from the wreck?" asked Brian.

"Fifteen thousand pounds—almost," answered Michael ; "I have kept back a little for myself—not much—to set me and Dorcas up in business somewhere abroad. You will not begrudge us that."

"Keep it," said Brian, after looking at Mabel for her consent to this.

"Thank you," he answered.

"And if you will go your way alone from this day," began Brian, "leaving Dorcas to our care, until time has assured us you are to be trusted——"

Dorcas interposed here, as hot and angry as in the old days.

"Would you separate man and wife?" she cried indignantly. "Do you think I would leave him, now I have faith in him?"

"He wishes you to accompany him?" asked Brian.

"Ay, I do," cried Michael Sewell. "I couldn't part with this good little woman for

the world. She will keep me straight—see if she does not.”

“My dear Michael!” exclaimed Dorcas.

“She must go then,” said Brian, doubtfully.

“I suppose you think I am shamming repentance, Brian?” asked Michael. “You never could believe in me.”

“I think at the present moment you have a strong idea of attempting your best,” was the reply.

“I have,” said Michael; “and you shall hear I have done well, too; and, by Heaven! I am glad you will be alive to hear it. There’s one thing more.”

“What is it?”

“I can’t do with the old man,” Michael said, with a shudder. “I can’t get along with his beastly selfish ways. I shall be much better, Brian, without him. For God’s sake take care of him somewhere!”

“I don’t want to go with you, Michael,” whined William Halfday. “I’d rather stop in England, if my dear boy Brian, whose life I have saved, will find me house and home.”

“I think I know of a cottage——”

"Not that damned place above Datchet Bridge!" exclaimed his father, with alacrity. "Put me in the workhouse rather than up there."

"I will find a home and a nurse for you," said Brian.

William Halfday murmured his thanks. It was no more than Brian could help doing, he thought; and he only hoped he should get a proper amount of attention from a hired domestic. He would have preferred to be one of the family after Brian had married.

"And now," said Dorcas, seizing Mabel's hands and kissing her, "let me leave you to Brian's care, and wish God's blessing on your future lives. You are the first woman Brian has loved—the first my own hard heart has ever warmed to. He will never be suspicious of you, as he has been of me and Michael," she added, half fretfully. "He will always think the best of you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Dorcas," said Mabel, returning her caress.

There were more farewells, but amongst them all Michael did not offer to shake hands with

the man whose life he had coveted. He bowed his head gravely to Brian, and walked away, and the young and confident wife went with him, her hands linked upon his arm.

"So they pass from your life, Mabel, and will shadow it no more," said Brian, after they had gone; "and there is only one Halfday left to trouble you."

"To trouble me as long as I live," she murmured; "just as he promised me at Datchet Bridge."

THE END.

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